THE WOMAN IN QUESTION

JOHN REED SCOTT

N. Lichman

THE WOMAN IN QUESTION

UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY, LOS ANGELES

JOHN REED SCOTT'S PREVIOUS SUCCESSES

THE COLONEL OF THE RED HUZZARS

A dashing love story with a secret at its root, and danger, adventure, and intrigue in every chapter.

"So naïvely fresh in its handling, so plausible through its naturalness, that it comes like a mountain-breeze across the far-spreading desert of similar romances."

—*Gazette Times, Pittsburg.*

Three full page illustrations in color, by Clarence F. Underwood.

12mo. Decorated cloth, $1.50.

THE PRINCESS DEHRA

A captivating romance in which we meet again the characters of "The Colonel of the Red Huzzars."

"There are situations involving the principal characters which are ingenious in conception and cleverly woven into the story by essential and natural sequence, and at these situations the reader feels a desire to continue the story, even if the house be burning. He has produced a story that is interesting and exciting, without being overdrawn."

—*Boston Evening Transcript.*

Four full-page illustrations in color, by Clarence F. Underwood.

12mo. Decorated cloth, $1.50.

BEATRIX OF CLARE

A fascinating story, the scenes of which are laid in England at the time of Richard the Third. The heroine, the Countess of Clare, is a beautiful and charming lady of the court, a protégée of the queen.

"Brisk and vivid."

—*New York Evening Sun.*

"Irresistibly attractive."

—*Philadelphia North American.*

Four full-page illustrations in color, by Clarence F. Underwood.

12mo. Decorated cloth, $1.50.

"CLEVER!" HE SAID, "CLEVER! WILL YOU SAY IT AGAIN, SIR?"

THE WOMAN IN QUESTION

BY

JOHN REED SCOTT

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL OF THE RED HUZZARS," "BEATRIX OF CLARE," "THE PRINCESS DEHRA," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR
BY CLARENCE F. UNDERWOOD

PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1909

COPYRIGHT, 1909
BY JOHN REED SCOTT

Published May, 1909

Printed by J. B. Lippincott Company
The Washington Square Press, Philadelphia, U. S. A.

To My Friends

OF

EGERTON and NORTHUMBERLAND

2133021

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Way of the Present	11
II.	The Spirit of the Past	30
III.	Counsellor and Friend	47
IV.	Milady of The Oaks	63
V.	The Doubtful One on the List	73
VI.	At the Foot of the Stairway	87
VII.	Playing the Part	105
VIII.	The Quality of Mercy	123
IX.	The Queer Element in the Case	140
X.	The Snuff-Box	155
XI.	Concerning Hair and Housebreaking	177
XII.	The Rout of the Imperial Guard	194
XIII.	Around the Loop by the Sugar-Loaf	212
XIV.	The Ultimatum	232
XV.	The Answer	251
XVI.	Knave, Queen and King	271
XVII.	The Penalty of the Loosened Tongue	290
XVIII.	The Breaking of the Ball	308
XIX.	An Order and a Toast	330

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

"CLEVER!" HE SAID, "CLEVER! WILL YOU SAY IT AGAIN, SIR?" ..... *Frontispiece*

"MRS. LEICESTER—MRS. GASCOYNE!" 98

"NO!" HE EXCLAIMED; "NO, HILDA, I WON'T." 304

THE WOMAN IN QUESTION

I

THE WAY OF THE PRESENT

Evelyn Leicester put down her parasol, and, lifting her gown generously in front, stepped lightly from the victoria. It was a Saturday afternoon in early May—soft, and warm, and bright—and the club-house piazza was thronged with the crowd; the usual crowd, as Mrs. Leicester knew it would be, her intimates and her enemies; and hence she had chosen to come in the victoria instead of her car. It was more uncommon, maybe, certainly more dignified, and it gave her the chance for an effective entrance—no flying veils, no unsightly dust-coats, no skurrying in to reduce unkemptness. Instead, a perfect coiffure, a fetching toilet, a charming picture—and yet, with it all, a sweet unconsciousness, that went straight to a man's heart; and to her enemy's too, though with a very different effect. And as all her enemies were of her own sex, it will be rather easy for those who are skilled in such matters to appreciate the nature of that effect.

But, for it, Mrs. Leicester did not care—when a woman is well-born, young, rich, and something of a beauty, she can afford to be indifferent; and

when, besides, she happens to be a widow, just burst from the chrysalis of crape and lavender, there are only roseate skies to the fore—the depth of the tint for the immediate distance being, however, in inverse ratio to her affection for the dear departed. And as in the present case it had been a fever of infatuation, with a speedy chill and a permanent disillusion, the tint was of the deepest from the very first.

"Goodness," said Mrs. Dalton, "she is in colors! Is it possible it's five years since Jack Leicester died?"

Miss Stockton nodded. "To the very day, I fancy—doubtless this is the anniversary celebration."

"Then I felicitate her on her costume," Mrs. Dalton laughed; "it's marvellously effective."

"In revealing her figure or her taste?" the other asked.

"In revealing both, and both are so perfect I, for one, don't blame her. You and I, Sarah, may have quite as exquisite taste, but we haven't the figure to exploit it."

Miss Stockton looked at the other's generous frame, thought of her own lean one, and assented with a thin-lipped smile.

"At any rate," she retorted, "I wouldn't have thought it necessary to hold my gown quite so high—not a man was looking."

"Nonsense!—trust the men; they all were look-

ing; but that's not why she did it; don't be so uncharitable—you know very well a gown of that length must be held up."

"And that's the very reason she wears them!" the other snapped; then she laughed. "Come, that wasn't nice of me, I admit, but Evelyn's dashing beauty and calm indifference get on my nerves. I wish I were fat, so I hadn't any."

"Bones or angles?" inflected Mrs. Dalton softly.

"Both, it's a pity you and I can't average.—There, look at the fool men! every dummy has rushed over to her."

"And the other three at every table are swearing because they can't. The woman whose mere arrival can break up a bridge game is forgiven much—by the men."

"To those who have much, much shall be forgiven!" Miss Stockton quoted sententiously.

"Depending, of course, upon what the much happens to be—there, she has sent them back and is coming. . . . My dear Evelyn, what a stunning gown! how nice it is to see you in colors again."

Mrs. Leicester smiled. "There isn't much difference between lavender and blue so far as effect goes, and yet somehow I feel horribly conspicuous—and I know Sarah, for one, won't call me sensitive."

"No," said Miss Stockton, "I won't; but one who is as pretty as you, Evelyn, doesn't need to be."

"No one is sensitive who isn't selfish," Mrs. Dalton remarked. "Sit down and have some tea."

"I can't, thank you; I'm promised to the Postlewaites, they are on the side piazza."

With an intimate little smile she passed on and around the corner. And if it is ill-bred to stare at or after another, then the well-bred, on the front piazza of the Northumberland Golf Club, would not have numbered sufficient to make up a four-some. Yet they could plead in mitigation, that one of the ancient and most cherished privileges of membership in a Country Club is the right to stare and to scandalize.

"I've run the gantlet!" Mrs. Leicester laughed, dropping into a chair at the Postlewaites' circle—"no, not any tea, thank you, a mint-julep if I may—and, Parsons, plenty of shaved ice, if you please."

"Why didn't you come through the house and avoid the gantlet?" said Colleton Harwood.

"Because I wanted to have it over, stupid; see, I'm back in the world again."

"It hadn't occurred to me that you were out of it, but now I see, since you show me; and the blue is very pretty indeed; but a man doesn't care greatly about the color of a gown, so long as the *tout ensemble* is to his liking."

"I know men who notice every detail of a woman's gown."

"Tailors?"

"No—not tailors!"

"Then they ought to be!" he laughed.

She sipped slowly at her julep.

"I suppose," he remarked, "I suppose it's because my artistic sense has never been sufficiently developed."

"I should say it's because some of your other senses have been over developed," she retorted, smiling into the glass.

He leaned a bit nearer—"The one, for instance, which reveals that you are looking stunningly fit, this afternoon?"

"Rather," said she, her face unsmiling, "the one that prompts you to tell me so."

"But I mean it!"

"Of course you do—but that is not the point. There are a lot of things I might say to you, and mean them too."

He took her empty glass and put it on the table.

"There is a team match on with the Heights—come along and have a look at it; some of the tennis will be pretty fast."

She regarded him uncertainly; then, with a word of excuse to Mrs. Postlewaite, she arose and they strolled out and across the lawn toward the courts, where the last two pairs in singles were nearing a finish. The match score was four to two for Northumberland, and the court score sets-all, with the third just begun.

"If we can pull out one of these matches," Harwood remarked, as he brought a couple of chairs

and put them with their backs to the sun, "we will win the cup; we are sure of two, at least, in the doubles."

"I thought you were on the team," she said.

"I am. Cartwright and I played early."

"You won?"

He nodded. "Carty was off his game, and I was rather better than usual. He smashed me the last time."

She glanced at his clothes. "Are you not to play in the doubles?"

"No—not unless we lose both these sets; I put young Maitland in my place; to try him out, with some older hand to steady him, before turning him loose in singles. The boy does very well in practice, but tournament is a very different proposition."

For a while they were silent, watching the game immediately in front. Presently there was a scatter of applause from the farther court, and the two players shook hands across the net.

"Which won?" Mrs. Leicester asked quickly.

"We didn't!" said Harwood. "I looked over just in time to see Henderson net the last point—and we are going to get it here, too. It will be up to the doubles."

"Then you want to go," she said.

"No, I don't; I'm going to stay right here—with you, that is. This is just the time to try the kid."

"But the match!"

"There are some things pleasanter even than winning tennis matches," he replied.

"Nonsense!" she laughed; "that doesn't impress me in the least; you simply don't want the bother of changing into flannels and out again."

"It's an awful thing never to be taken seriously," he reflected.

"On the contrary, it's very fortunate for you; it permits you to say the most flattering things without the least danger of being compromised."

"But sometime I may want to be compromised."

"Then, my dear Colleton, hunt out an innocent debutante, or an unsophisticated country maiden; don't try it on——"

"I say, Harwood!" said Tony Wilberforce, coming up hurriedly, "you will have to play in the doubles; the youngster can wait until another time. We simply must pull out this match, and it will take three to do it, and not a man to spare. James is putting it all over Preston, here—there, that's the end! Now come along and get dressed. There's a bunch of money up—the grill-room got foolish at luncheon."

Harwood glanced at Mrs. Leicester.

"Go!" she said; "of course we must win—and I'll stay and watch you, as a mild incitant."

Wilberforce took Harwood's chair.

"And I'll remain on guard," he laughed. "Chase yourself, Colleton! I'll hold the court."

"Now, there's a chap," he went on, jerking his head toward Harwood's retreating figure, "who needs some one to stir him up—does everything well, and that contents him; he could be a star in a half-dozen ways, if he only tried."

"All of which is only a long way of saying that he is lazy," she smiled.

"No!" emphatically, "that's just the point, he isn't lazy—he is indifferent, apathetic—too much money, and too much leisure, and too many women trying to get him into their own particular family. The combination is enough to spoil any Saint that ever was canonized—and Harwood misses saint-hood by more than a few scant halos, I admit."

"I wondered if you would leave out the poor women," she retorted; "nevertheless, I must concede the accuracy of your diagnosis; now, what is your remedy?"

"Marriage!"

"On the principle, I suppose, of one poison neutralizing another?"

"Exactly! but it must be the proper poison, not one taken blindly simply because it is a poison."

"And have you the particular poison in mind?"

He nodded, looking significantly at her. "Yes—only, it is so refractory, and so generally dangerous to meddle with, that the most daring physician would hesitate to prescribe it."

"But assuming it were administered, would the cure be permanent?" she asked.

"If it isn't, he ought to die."

"And what of the poison, if *she* failed?"

"She couldn't fail—it would be impossible. Lord, I wish I had Harwood's afflictions! I'd risk the cure."

Mrs. Leicester leaned back and laughed heartily.

"Really, Tony, your impertinence is refreshing! —why don't you try the poison, yourself?"

"Because it's too expensive—I can't afford it. It's a wise man who knows what he can't afford. Here comes Colleton; he's made a record change—and shiver my timbers, if he hasn't old 'Queen Vic' in tow!"

He got up and bowed Mrs. Postlewaite into his chair, with the most profound deference, winked slyly at Mrs. Leicester, and went out on the court.

Maintaining a desultory skirmish-fire of comment and small talk, Mrs. Leicester watched the match. Once she had played a rather pretty game herself, could still, doubtless, though the last few years abroad had put her sadly out of practice. Now she felt a touch of the old fever, the lure of the court and the net. What a game it was!—of head and hand and eye—the game of the gentle-bred, before all others—where honesty and courtesy are on parade, and the boor and the bounder stand exposed. And the grace and beauty of it, when rightly played; the ball taken low; the follow through; the contriving for position; the drive down the line; the lob, the irritating, tiresome lob;

the finishing smash! And Harwood; how well he did them all—how pretty his swing, how strong his back-hand, how clever his placing, how sure when the opening came. She remembered now that he was something of a crack in his college days, though she had no recollection of his game, if ever, indeed, she had seen him play. Indolent! one who could cover a court as he did? Indifferent! Apathetic! Superficially, maybe; not when stirred to life.

She had known Colleton Harwood so long she had quite lost all idea of him save in the mass, for she knew him so well she did not need to analyze. She remembered him first, as one of the big boys in the dancing class where she was the youngest girl; and that he had been kind, and thoughtful, and nice to her, when she was backward and sensitive and awkward. Indeed, he had been one of her childish loves, until he went off to school—and when he came back, he patronized her in the usual under-graduate fashion; and she snubbed him, which did not disturb him in the least. Presently she herself went off to school, and when she returned they settled down to a good, frank friendship that had been very satisfactory—to her at least. Then came her whirlwind marriage; and Harwood had raced back from Egypt to be *her* usher, and to wish her happiness, even though, as she knew, he heartily disapproved the match, and of Jack Leicester. When her widow-

hood fell so suddenly, and, it must be confessed, so welcomely upon her, he was somewhere in India; and to the letter which she had written him came the answering cablegram: "The elder brother resumes his place and charge."

And this was the exact sentiment between them, though, in truth, there had been little opportunity for the old *camaraderie;* for when he came loitering back from India, by way of the Canal and half the Capitals of Europe, she was far out on the Pacific making the circle, but with no schedule and no haste. So it was two years before they met, unexpectedly, on the piazza of Shepheard's—and after a week of long talks and confidences, he and his party had gone off to hunt big game in Abyssinia, and to have a look at King Menelik, and thence on to the Cape. She did not see him again until the past winter, down on the Florida East Coast, where, in the six weeks they were in the same big treadmill of a hotel, he had resumed the elder brother attitude, bossing and bullying and teasing and jealously watching lest, as he said, she "make a mess of it a second time."

Of course, she had rejoined that there was not to be a second time; at which he had laughed, and said something about the chance of another Jack Leicester happening along. After which, she had been very dignified and formal with him for two days—though he never seemed to notice it.

Her mind had been running back over these

things, stirred by Wilberforce's jesting banter that she and Harwood ought to marry. Now Colleton came plunging over, and, with a full-sweep, backhand drive, cross-courted the ball between his opponents to the far corner.

"What is the score?" Mrs. Postlewaite demanded, as he brought up before her and stopped.

"That's our set," he answered. "It's sort of a runaway. Like it?"—to Mrs. Leicester.

"It's bully!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea you put up such a game. I'll have to try you myself."

"Good!—we have the mixed doubles down at the Heights next Saturday, you shall play with me."

"Shall?" she laughed.

"Yes, shall! I'm the Northumberland captain; besides, you don't fancy I'd give you to any one else!"

That evening, after dinner—when the grill-room's celebration of their victory had reached the stage where the one big cup was both too shallow and too few, and all the trophies in the house had been pressed into service—Harwood slipped away, and went up to the main piazza for a quiet smoke.

The orchestra was playing in the gallery, and the cool May air had sent all the youngsters in to dance, and most of the elders to avoid the dampness. He watched the room for a bit through the long, open

window, then turned toward his particular corner to finish his cigar before ordering his car. But it was occupied, and he was passing on when Mrs. Leicester's voice halted him.

"Won't you join us?" she asked—"or rather, won't you keep me company for a little while?—the Williamsons are going, and I'm too comfortable to move, or too lazy."

He bowed the Williamsons away—and sat down.

"I may smoke?"

"Naturally!" she laughed. "What creatures of convention we all are."

He put his hand to his pocket. "Have a cigarette?"

"And of unconvention, you and I. I've been wanting a cigarette for an hour, and out of regard for Mrs. Williamson's reputed weak heart I've refrained. Give me your cigar, no use illuminating my face with a match." She swung her chair further into the shadows, her back to the house. "Now, all ye dowagers and gossips, keep away!"

"What's the odds who sees you?" he asked. "Why shouldn't a woman smoke?"

"No reason in the world except local opinion hasn't been educated up to it."

"And it never will be, until it has been given lessons in anti-provincialism."

"Quite true, Colleton; but I don't care to be the one to start the instruction. I'd rather forego a cigarette than have all the old tabbies in

town mewing at me. I keep them busy enough, as it is."

"Oh, I understand; it's simply a question of expediency, and doubtless your way is the wiser; but isn't it absurd:—a woman may drink six sorts of wine at dinner, and yet she mustn't smoke a little, innocent cigarette! It's the ridiculousness of it, and its rotten narrowness that riles me. If I were a woman, and wanted to smoke, I would smoke, and the festering old cats, male as well as female, could go to——or elsewhere."

Mrs. Leicester laughed softly.

"Colleton," said she, leaning over and looking up at him, "you have reams of good qualities, but the chief of them all is your broad-minded liberality. You ought to get married; such men as you are quite too few to be wasted in solitariness."

"On that score," Harwood laughed back, "I'm better as I am; I can buzz around and distribute my 'broad-minded liberality'—really, that's quite good!—upon all the girls I like. Marry—and click! the bars are tight, and only one of you can be blessed. It's the first time, my dear, I ever knew you to advocate selfishness."

"Selfishness!" she exclaimed, "when I should be resigning you wholly to another woman?"

"And that is another obstacle; I have you to look after, and you're rather too pretty, Evelyn, to be popular with the woman-in-question, whoever she might be. So you see, between you and the general

good of your sex, I'm committed to confirmed bachelorhood."

"Do you know, Colleton, that is the first time you ever told me I was pretty—when did you notice it?"

"I didn't tell you *then*—I only remarked it, as one does a self-evident fact. Do you think I'm blind? You were the prettiest thing this afternoon up at the courts, I ever saw—and that's going some; I reckon I've seen a few pretty women in my time."

"And who is the next prettiest?" she laughed.

"This afternoon?"

"No, stupid, anywhere?"

He thought a moment. "I don't know her name. I saw her only once, for a moment."

"Where?"

"On the Grand Canal—my gondola passed hers."

"By moonlight?"

"No, bright sunlight — bright as on the courts to-day."

"Thank you, Colleton, that is a compliment quite worth while. And my rival—Italian, I suppose?"

"American, I think."

"Describe her, can't you?"

"No—as I told you, it's the *tout ensemble* that I see."

"And you don't know if she were dark or fair, large or small, stout or slender?"

He laughed. "I'm sure that she wasn't large nor stout. She was slender, like you; and it seems to me her hair was black, but of that I've never

been sure. It was the marvellous regularity of her features and their expressive beauty that held me. Our boats almost collided; I saw her only for the instant the gondoliers slowed down to sprinkle each other with vituperation."

"And you never saw her again?"

"No."

"Nor ever tried to?"

"Never, directly."

"Confess, my dear boy, that you haunted Florian's—that you were always on the lookout for her."

"In the sense that I should have recognized her instantly, yes."

"You spoke to her?"

"Naturally. I apologized in French for my man's awkwardness."

"To be sure!—and she?"

"Laughed—a deliciously soft, enticing laugh—and absolved me with a wave of her fan."

"Hence 'the expressive beauty' of her features," she quoted. "But I don't understand why you made no effort to find her, or at least to ascertain her name. A beautiful woman, in a gondola, on the Grand Canal, almost an accident, an apology and an absolution! Haven't you any romance in you, Colleton?"

"Not any."

"And yet you remember her laugh and her beauty!"

"Just as I remember the delicious dinner I had that very night with the Camerons, on their yacht."

"Nonsense, that's affectation! You have plenty of romance, or sentiment, or whatever one may prefer to term it, but you've never found the woman to stir it to real life. This Venetian girl came pretty near it—another such meeting and you would have had no rest until you found her."

"And then?" he laughed.

"Then it would be up to her—if she were the right sort and knew how to handle you."

"And you would advise that I go on the hunt of her?" he asked.

"Of her, or of someone. Buy a home and settle down—a place in the country where you can avoid temptation and Clubs."

"I have one now—at least it's in the country; I can't answer for the temptation nor the Clubs, I've never seen it."

"Win it at auction-bridge?"

"Not exactly: I inherited it a few months ago. It is Fairlawn, the old Harwood place, down at Egerton. It was owned by a distant bachelor-cousin; and as it seems there is an inherited obligation that it shall always descend by entail to the eldest male of the family, he passed it on to me; with the usual condition attached that I must reside there at least thirty days every year."

"And you have never seen your ancestral home!" she exclaimed—"you who have spent your life wan-

dering over the earth!—and that, when it's only a night's ride away?"

"No; somehow I never went—maybe it was too near; had it been a long journey, doubtless I should have visited it many times. And it's an interesting old shop, I understand; filled with all sorts of antiques, and family relics and belongings—would you like to see it?"

"There is nothing I should like better."

"Good!" he said. "This is the cream of the year, in that section. Make up a house-party of ten for a week or two. I'll run down to-morrow and arrange for it; and after the match here on Saturday, I'll take you all back with me."

"Whom do you want in particular?" she asked.

"You. I don't care anything about the rest—they are for you to pick."

"I wish I could find the lady of the Grand Canal," she laughed.

"So do I!—to prove——"

A servant approached and stood at attention.

"Well?" said Harwood.

"Mrs. Postlewaite asks if Mrs. Leicester is ready—the car is waiting," the man monotoned.

"Say to Mrs. Postlewaite I am coming at once," said Evelyn, getting up. "You have kept me a most unseemly time, Colleton." Under the big lamp at the front, she paused. "What was it you wanted to prove by having the Venetian lady in the house-party?—that you are not romantic?"

"No," he said. "Not that—something more to the purpose."

She looked up at him with her most artful smile.

"What?" she said softly; "what?"

"You little flirt!" he laughed. "Don't try your fascinations on me—or, at least, wait until we are down at Egerton."

"And you will tell me then?" she whispered, pressing his fingers, as he put her in the car.

"Yes," said he, answering her hand, "I'll tell you then—maybe."

II

THE SPIRIT OF THE PAST

EGERTON was not an especially old town, even as old towns go in the original Thirteen States. Its birth year was the opening one of the last century; its *raison d'être*, the formation of a new county, and the consequent need of a seat for the local government. And that has remained its only *raison d'être* to this day. For three generations, it slumbered in complacent obscurity and passive respectability and righteousness—then, one day, somewhere down in the Valley of Virginia, a great battle strayed away in its sleep, to awake suddenly at Egerton. When it had fought itself out, the town had entered into the celebrity which attaches to a crucial event of History. But as it was content with obscurity, so was it content with fame—the statics of sixty years were not to be startled into dynamics, even by the fearful thunder of many guns. And so, in time, Egerton lost forever the little individuality it had, and all its pride in an honorable founding and a well-bred past, and was swallowed up by a National Cemetery and a battlefield.

Just why that particular site had been chosen for the county-seat passes understanding, save that the land was donated by a generous citizen who

wanted a town near his tavern, and because the only other location suggested and urged was even worse, and did not have the advantage of the tavern. Then, with ample room inside the limits and the whole county to spread over, the wise founders proceeded to slice the town into tiny lots, and to build the houses flush with the street-line and tight against each other; the reason for which has never been discovered; unless it were to insure a minimum of light and air and a maximum of fire risk. Hither came many of the most substantial and leading citizens of the county, from their plantations (they called them such) in West Creek Valley, a few miles distant, bringing with them culture and education, and making up the fashionable society of the village. Chief among them was Captain Beverly Harwood, Colleton Harwood's several times great-grandfather—but he did not build in the town. And the reason whereof is this:

When the Colonies passed out in Revolution, the old settlers in the West Creek sent their sons to the service, and such as were able went themselves, as well. Major John Harwood—he had his title in the Provincial troops in the French War of '55—was incapacitated by wounds for field duty, and his only son was then of too tender years for soldiering, so the veteran turned his energies to the civil side of the contest. But the day Beverly Harwood was seventeen, his father handed him a commission as Ensign in the Continental Line, with

the necessary uniform and equipment, and bade him repair forthwith to his regiment and report for duty. And young Mr. Harwood had expressed his joy and his thanks with becoming deference, and that same day, having received his sire's blessing and his mother's kiss, he rode off for Monmouth and his new duties.

He had proved a smart soldier; and peace found him the senior captain of his regiment, on detached staff-service in the Carolinas, where, at the end, he marched with Wayne into Charleston as Leslie's Red-coats marched out. And there he had lingered for months, held by the fascinations of a fair face, seen that day for the first time in a balcony of Broad Street. And when he at last turned northward, in the ship bound for Annapolis, a Mistress Beverly Harwood went with him—she of the fair face in the Broad Street balcony: Betty Colleton, of Fairlawn Hall on the Cooper. And if the Peale portrait of him, painted a few years thereafter, which hangs in the drawing-room at Egerton, may be held trustworthy, then the lady would seem to have had every justification—superficially at least—in her choice of a husband. Which brings us back to the house.

When Madame Harwood saw the town, and its constricted plan, she would have none of it, albeit she was quite willing to be close to it rather than on the Harwood plantation, three miles away. So she chose a site nearby, on the ridge to the west,

where the view was unrestricted, and light and air and sunshine were subject to no man's whim. And her husband laughed, and gave her her way; and then, in further compliment, he named it Fairlawn, and built the house in its pattern, with a great garden in the rear and on each side, encompassed with a high hedge of locust, thick-set and close-cut. And here the fair mistress of it all had again the flowers of her youth; the borders of box and mock-orange and japonica, the jasmine, azaleas and magnolias, the rose arbors, the violets,—only, here, the violets bloomed but three months instead of the whole year through; and the roses flowered late and faded quickly; and only the japonica lingered the same, though it too blossomed later, and was neither so gorgeous nor so sweet.

As the years passed, other mistresses walked in the garden and other masters ruled—always a Beverly or a Colleton—and ever in Egerton had Fairlawn stood for dignity; where only the old friends were received as of course, and others who would enter had to prove their worthiness, either by who they were, or by what they had done. It was the natural legacy which a Betty Colleton leaves to her home and her descendants—and in this instance both were worthy of her, and her spirit still pervaded the old house.

In truth, Egerton had always been proud of Fairlawn, and—save for that class in every small town, who are of the herd and know it, and resent

it—the people were glad to have the Harwood wealth and culture to lead their social life, and to represent them in the outer world, where few of them were known or acquainted, or indeed had ever been. And when, in the stir of politics, or litigation, some celebrity came to address them, or some noted lawyer to attend court, it was to Fairlawn that Egerton looked for their entertainment and care. And though the late-deceased owner was a bachelor, yet the hospitality had never dulled, for his widowed sister was there to play the mistress. They brought her home one morning, crushed and broken beneath the hunter whose careless take-off had been fatal to them both. Two weeks later, they laid Beverly Harwood beside her, the victim of a drenching rainstorm's vengeance for a strong man's scorn.

Thus it was, that Colleton Harwood became master of Fairlawn. All Egerton was expectant of his coming, and marvelled much that he tarried; and among those, whose particular occupation was investigating and disseminating the affairs of others, there had been a clacking time; there was so much they wanted to know and so little they could learn. Of course, this paucity of actual knowledge affected only the accuracy and not the volume of the gossip. But as the days and weeks passed, and still the new owner did not come, nor any word from him, unless it were to the family counsellor (and he would not talk), the " they-sayers " grew desper-

ate, and falling upon one another's lies they tore them all to tatters; then settled down expectantly and with whetted tongues for the coming of the man himself—they bore him a grudge, they declared, for the indignity he had put upon the town by his indifference to his inheritance. In their inexperience and narrow-minded self-sufficiency, they had no conception of a world where no one bothers an instant about another, save casually when the other passes under his immediate vision, or is encountered directly in business or society.

As for Harwood himself, had he been within reach, when his cousin died, he would have done him the courtesy of attending the obsequies; but that not being possible, he had seen no reason for hurrying to formally take possession. He would go down, in due and convenient season, and look the place over; and if he thought thirty days residence a year were too high a price to pay, he would decline the devise and pass it on to the next in line. So he wrote a note to Judge Casson, to keep the house open and retain all the servants; and then for the time he dismissed the matter from his mind. It was Mrs. Leicester that had brought it back.

Harwood motored down to Egerton; it was a good opportunity to try out his new car, and vastly preferable to crawling out of a berth at a junction at five in the morning, and waiting three hours for a slow train across—and, besides, the car would

be needed there next week. He could have made the run in a day, but there was no occasion for haste, so he did it in two, leisurely and in comfort. It was late in the afternoon, when the big machine thrummed down the last hill and into Egerton, paused long enough for the driver to inquire the way to Fairlawn, and then swung around, and, returning to the forks of the street, shot out to the ridge half a mile away, where the white pillars shone among the trees.

The house stood a bit back from the avenue that followed the ridge; as they turned into it, and Harwood caught a full view of the place, he sat up sharply.

"Drive slow!" he said.

And at a pace that filled the chauffeur with shame, they crept in and drew up before the entrance—twin stairways leading up to a Georgian piazza.

For a little while he sat in the car, silent and wondering. This massive brick house, red with the soft red of age, imposing, aristocratic, was not the Fairlawn he had pictured and was prepared to patronize. He smiled; rather was it for him to live up to it.

The front door was open; as Colleton alighted, a young negro, in blue livery with scarlet facings, came hurriedly out to meet him.

"Mr. Harwood?" he asked, with that peculiarly deferential bow of his race, when addressing a superior.

"Yes," said Colleton, "I am Mr. Harwood—and you?"

"William, sir, the butler—we all are glad you have come, sir."

He spoke without any of the negro twang, and even the slurring of the "r" was very faint.

"And so am I, William, so am I—ever since I saw this house."

At the piazza, the negro sprang forward and stood in the doorway.

"Welcome home, master!" he exclaimed, bowing almost to the ground, "welcome home!"

Home! the word caught Harwood suddenly in its full significance here, and with bowed head he passed the threshold.

"Where are my quarters?" he asked, not caring to betray sentiment before a servant, nor, indeed, to admit it even to himself.

They passed through the square entrance hall, panelled sides and ceiling in walnut, and up the wide stairway in the rear, that branched into two under the windows and pillars of the landing.

William threw open the door on the right.

"Will you have your tea here, sir, or in the library?" he asked.

Harwood smiled. "Does the custom at Fairlawn obligate me to drink tea in the afternoon?"

"No, sir, Mr. Beverly didn't—or at least not often; but Miss Betty, his sister—Mrs. Singleton, that is—always had it served, and I didn't know."

"Then remember, William, that it will be quite unnecessary ever to serve me with tea in the afternoon—when there are guests, have it for them, of course. If you think I need something now, you might make it a rye high-ball, if you happen to have the necessary ingredients."

"Ginger ale, seltzer, or ice water, sir?"

"Seltzer," said Harwood. "Really," he laughed, when the servant had gone, "even from the little I've seen of this place, I fancy I can put in those thirty days very comfortably. . . . William, how long have you been here?"

"I was born at Fairlawn, sir—my mother is Cleopatra the cook, my father, Cæsar, was the butler before me; he died last year. He was of the old times, sir."

"And you are of the new?"

"I suppose so, sir; that is, I've had something of an education—Mr. Beverly sent me to college—and I'm not so sure it wasn't a mistake. God made the negro for a servant, and learning only spoils him. You know yourself, sir, you would rather have old Cæsar's fussy ways and queer plantation talk.—What hour will you dine, sir?"

"What has been the custom here?" Harwood asked.

"Seven o'clock, sir."

"Seven make it, then. And telephone Judge Casson to do me the honor of dining with me."

He looked after the butler, doubtfully. "Fair-

lawn has sprung more surprises in ten minutes than Northumberland in as many months, but this last is rather too startling—an educated negro who knows his place, and is willing to stay in it! I'm afraid, William, you will bear watching."

Having splashed himself well with water, he fell to sipping his drink and inspecting the room. He was not an expert in antiques, but at least he knew enough to appreciate something of the artistry of the furniture; all Sheraton, from the great high bed in the corner, to the slender shaving-stand near the side window. He went over and drew aside the curtain; a bit of the garden lay below him, and its call came up. Hitherto, gardens had not been of things attractive, but now the Colleton in him answered, and he obeyed. And as from the rear piazza he looked upon it, and realized its vast extent and its peculiar beauty—such beauty as only age can give to turf and shrub and tree—he stopped, and, leaning on the rail, he gloated over it with all the pride of possession. And with something more: the pride of descent—for this was Betty Colleton's garden, planned and planted and loved by her; and even to the most unregenerate of her offspring, Betty Colleton would always be a goddess of the Blue.

He did not notice the turban-covered head of old Cleopatra, as she watched him from a window in the kitchen wing, curbing the while, with her long spoon, the noisy whispers of the two young maids

beside her; nor did he hear butler William come to the doorway, behind him, and, after a moment's pause, turn and go softly away. They knew that the magic of the garden was upon him—as they had seen it upon other Harwoods; and though William understood it in a fashion, yet to Cleopatra it had always meant, that the spirit of the fair, first mistress was returned to wander, for a little while, in the paths it had loved in the flesh.

Suddenly, from off toward the town, came the shriek of a locomotive whistle. Harwood started and glanced around, half guiltily, in time to catch Cleopatra's stare. He smiled, and waved his hand to her, and, through the open window, he could see her half-curtsy in respectful acknowledgment. Then, lighting a cigar, he went down the stone steps, with their slender wrought-iron balustrade, and sauntered out among the flowers.

The mock-orange and the honey-suckle were redolent in the hedges, and on the arbors the old-fashioned roses of pink and white, and the Cherokees, were bursting into bloom. The setting sun was just beginning to touch with fire the tips of the distant mountains, and the soft breeze of the coming twilight caught up every fragrance, and blending them in one exquisite perfume, offered it in gentle courtesy as tribute to the new ruler. And he accepted instantly, with head back and eyes half closed; though, as yet, he was too new to gardens, and the ways of flowers, to understand.

Far back near the rear wall—long ago brick had replaced the locust hedge—he came upon a bench on which lay a current copy of a magazine. Evidently the butler was given to loafing here, and, casually curious, Harwood sat down and opened at the marked page.

"The Fourth Dimension!" he read aloud; "The Fourth Dimension! Now what would you think of that!"

He glanced over the article; it was technical to the last degree; filled with the most intricate mathematical demonstrations, the very terms of which he had long forgot, if indeed he ever knew them. And William was reading it! and was sufficiently interested to mark the place when interrupted. He had not asked where that education was acquired; now he knew—it was Harvard. Idly he turned the pages, pausing presently at a riot of color, by an illustrator whose bad-men are characterized by their malignant faces, and his Colonial gentlemen by their enormous feet. He remembered that some one had spoken of this picture, and how, with its priggish-looking man and pasty-faced girl, it misrepresented and injured the story, which had to do with attractive people and was clever and well-told. The *mise en scène* was a garden, and its pertinence caught his fancy; he grew interested, and holding the book high to catch the best of the fading light, he read on.

From where he sat the postern gate was not

visible, and so he did not see it open, and a young woman, in a trailing blue gown, and hatless, enter and come toward him—a small, white caniche trotting beside her, his mistress' color in bows on head and neck.

"What is it, Chum?" she asked, as the dog ran in front and looked up at her questioningly. "What's here now that you don't like?"

He smiled and shook his stumpy tail in answer, then with a tiny, grumbling growl he sprang away to the turn in the path, at the end of the hedge, and gave one sharp bark.

It lowered Harwood's book and brought him around with a start.

"Hello, there!" he laughed, "what toy shop did you escape from?"

The dog, erect and immovable, gave him a saucy stare.

Harwood leaned forward and snapped his fingers.

"Come here, little chap!" he said. "Come here and tell me about it. Where's your mistress?"

The dog looked quickly up the path, and with a faint whimper of affection disappeared.

Half tempted to follow, and yet held by the unfinished story, Colleton was still balanced in indecision when mistress and dog turned the hedge. She was looking down at him, talking softly, and she did not observe Harwood until Chum growled.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and stopped.

"I am very sorry if I startled you," said he,

bowing; "I am Colleton Harwood." Then he smiled at the dog. "My compliments on the caniche; he is the prettiest I ever saw."

She gave him the flash of a look.

"Yes," stooping and picking up the toy, "he is a dear little fellow. Chum, say 'thank you.'"

The dog looked at the man and smiled, and spoke to him in tones that had no resemblance to a bark.

Harwood put out his hand and rubbed him softly back of the ear.

"Clever!" he said, "clever! will you say it again, sir?"

The bright eyes sought their mistress; she smiled and nodded; at once, he turned toward Colleton and repeated the tones.

All the time Harwood was covertly studying the mistress. Where had he seen her face? There was something strikingly familiar, and yet at the same time, utterly strange. The sun was down, and light was none of the brightest there among the trees and hedges, but he could see that her hair was red—Titian red—and complexion of the fairest, that goes with it; that the nose was fine and slender, and that the lips were a bow above and a pout below; but as for the eyes, they were so hid in the shadow of the long lashes that their color he could not catch.

She held out her hand to him. "Convention requires me to bid you welcome to Egerton, though

I really don't mean it; Chum and I hate to be turned out of this garden."

"Then why be turned out?" he asked, taking her hand and shaking it frankly. "Surely, I do not wish to keep this beautiful place all to myself!"

"Convention! convention! always convention!" she laughed. "The flying battery of ancient-and-honorable-gossips, down in yonder town, will be encamped around these walls at day-break to-morrow; doubtless they have pickets already out who will report this meeting. You have yet to learn the awful responsibilities of being *The* Harwood."

"I've been learning so much, the few hours I've been here, that I fear the ancient-and-honorable will have to bide a bit for their turn. In the meantime, and all time, grape and canister, solid shot and shrapnel to the contrary notwithstanding, the garden is yours."

She laughed; a soft, infectious laugh, that sent Harwood's memory flying back in search.

"Thank you!" she said; "but I may claim it only when you are not in Egerton."

"At least," he expostulated, "you will let Chum come and talk with me."

"Gladly—but Chum never leaves his mistress."

"Sensible Chum!" said Colleton, but so graciously there was no touch of triteness.

"Faithful Chum!" she corrected; then stepped to the bench and took up the magazine. "This is what I came for; I left it here at luncheon."

Without a word, he turned and escorted her to the postern.

"And was it you who were reading 'The Fourth Dimension'?" he asked, presently.

She shot a quick glance at him, which, in the twilight, he missed.

"Yes," she answered; "isn't it simply adorable!"

Harwood shuddered.

"Do you really understand it?" he asked bluntly.

Once again came the soft, infectious laugh.

"Not a word! I've been reading it on a wager, and after seven days I'm only half through; I simply can't keep awake."

"Thank the Lord!" he exclaimed, as he stepped forward and swung back the grille.

"Why, 'thank the Lord'?" she asked, stopping in the gateway, and dismissing him with extended hand.

"Because I don't want to be afraid of you."

"No, no!" she smiled; "it's because you don't want a neighbor who would bore you with isms and half-baked theories; you're safe in that respect, I assure you. Good-night!"

"At your gate, not at mine," he said.

"No, here; it's only a little way; and Chum will take care of me. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" he said, seeing that she meant it. "I suppose," he spoke after her, "even the Egerton ancient-and-honorable will permit me to visit a neighbor to-morrow?"

She turned half around, but without halting: "Yes, at five!—and Chum says he shall be glad to see you."

"And will he tell me his mistress' name?" Harwood called.

But only the soft laugh came back in answer.

III

COUNSELLOR AND FRIEND

As Harwood came down to the library that evening, a short while before dinner, the butler was waiting in the hall.

"What wines shall I serve, sir?" he asked.

"Do you know Judge Casson's preference?"

"A little brown sherry with the soup, sir, and then champagne."

"Very good. . . . Stay, William, I quite forgot! Shall I send the car for Judge Casson, or has he a conveyance of his own?"

The butler grinned—he had not yet learned the frozen-face and the intone; indeed, save in his speech, he was still the son of his parents; a negro cannot be made into an automaton in a single generation.

"The Judge has his horses, sir; and even if he hadn't, he would not use your car. He despises automobiles. . . . There he is now! I know his big sorrel's step," and he hurried out.

"Here, you good-for-nothing young rascal, take my bag!" Colleton heard, in sharp tones that, at the same time, were very kindly.

"Yes, sir; yes, sir!"

It was perilously near the broad "yas suh," and even Harwood noticed it. Later he observed it

always happened when the butler was addressed by one who had known him from pickaninnyhood.

Harwood met his guest on the piazza, and the two shook hands and appraised each other.

"Clean-cut and decent," thought the Judge.

"Old-fashioned and dependable," thought Colleton.

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Harwood," was what the Judge said; "welcome, sir! welcome to Egerton; and, if I may, to Fairlawn."

And Harwood thanked him, and still holding his hand ushered him within.

"And so this is your first sight of Fairlawn?" the Judge exclaimed, as he spread wide the tails of his coat and settled himself comfortably at the dinner-table.

For forty years no one had ever seen James Casson in anything but black broad-cloth and a frock coat (a Prince Albert, as Egerton knew it); except on the most formal occasions when he donned a "swallow-tail," as he styled it, of very ancient vintage; no matter what the heat, it was the only costume he wore, as the only one suitable for a gentleman in general, and a lawyer in particular. He had been scandalized to profanity when the sack suit of variegated hue entered within the sacred precincts of the Bar; and the day that an impious law-student appeared there, in a blazer of his alma mater's colors and white flannel trousers, the old man had suffered a nervous shock which

totally unfitted him for service that entire trial-week. Lucky, indeed, was it for the comfort and freedom of the Bar of Egerton that he no longer sat upon the Bench, and that he belonged to the minority party now and so had no chance to return there, save by appointment—which, indeed, was no chance at all, for he was not "in line."

"Yes," said Harwood, "this is my first sight of Fairlawn; indeed, I had never so much as seen a picture of it."

"And what do you think of it, sir; what do you think of it?—Are you not proud of it?"

"Who wouldn't be——"

"Exactly! who wouldn't be?" the Judge cut in, "who wouldn't be? A poor sort of man who could look upon this place as master, and look unmoved. Why, bless you, sir, I've come to feel that, after a Harwood, it belongs to a Casson; we have been associated with it since the first stone was laid; nay, before; a Casson wrote the deed to Captain Harwood; a Casson has been the Harwood's counsel or his guardian, ever since." He arose and raised his glass. "I give you Fairlawn, sir, and its new lord!"

"And I," said Colleton, motioning William to replenish the Judge's wine, "I give you Casson—Fairlawn's and Harwood's friend!"

The Judge bowed low in response, and drank slowly and with feeling.

"Friends the families have always been, sir," he

began, as soon as he found his chair; "friends since they settled near each other, out there in West Creek Valley, more than a century and a half ago. Beverly Harwood and James Casson were class-mates at Princeton, when they went together as Ensigns in the Continental Line. My ancestor resigned after two years' service and returned to his college, yours served to the end of the war. What mine should have done, sir, what mine should have done! To-day, sir, Captain Beverly Harwood's diploma, as an Original Member of the Order of the Cincinnati, hangs in yonder library; and you, as his nearest male descendant, inherit his right and the Eagle; while I—well, I don't—because my grandfather didn't stay long enough with the Colors to qualify him to join. And for that, sir, and with all due respect to his memory and his virtues, I have always borne him a grudge, and I always shall."

"I confess I didn't know we had the Cincinnati in the family," said Colleton. "I——"

"Just so, sir, just so! it is usually those who haven't it who value it. Now there's your predecessor, God rest his soul! I had the devil's own time in persuading him to join—I wrote out his papers myself; and the unappreciative boy never even wore the rosette."

Somehow, the old man's vehement enthusiasm, here in the shrine of his family's past, stirred Harwood's dormant pride of caste. Like every Amer-

ican who knows anything of his country's history, he was, of course, familiar in a general way with the Cincinnati, but to him it was only an abstract incident, without any personal application. Yesterday, he would have been indifferent, maybe cynical, as to membership; to-day, the atmosphere of Fairlawn was heavy upon him. He turned to the butler.

"Bring the diploma here!" he ordered.

He leaned forward and examined the old parchment, in its gilt frame, yellowed a bit by age, yet faded not at all.

> "Be it known that Beverly Harwood Esquire—is a Member of the Society of the Cincinnati; instituted by the Officers of the American Army, at the Period of its Dissolution, as well to Commemorate the great Event which gave Independence to North America as for the laudable Purpose of inculcating the Duty of laying down in Peace Arms assumed for public Defence, and of uniting in Acts of brotherly Affection and Bonds of perpetual Friendships the Members constituting the same.
>
> "In testimony whereof I, the President of the said Society, have hereunto set my Hand at Mount Vernon, in the State of Virginia this Twenty-Sixth Day of April in the year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-seven and in the Eleventh Year of the Independance of the United States.
>
> "By order,
>
> "H. KNOX, "G. WASHINGTON,
>
> "Secretary. "President."

Slowly he read it through; lingering at the end over the signatures.

Judge Casson watched him with a shrewd smile. The diploma would win.

"And you say I am entitled to membership?" Harwood asked. "Will you prepare my papers?"

"That I will, and gladly. I happen to have an extra set at the office, left over from your cousin's case; as well as a copy of all the necessary data. I shall have it ready for your signature to-morrow, sir. We must move quickly if you are to be admitted this Fourth of July; if you miss it, you will have to wait another year."

"Very well!" Colleton laughed, "since you've headed me for the hurdle I may as well take it this year as next," and he waved his champagne glass at the Judge and gave him an excuse for a fresh supply—though, had he been guilty of watching his guest, he would have observed that no excuse was needed.

And Judge Casson, having accomplished his object in regard to the Cincinnati, dropped the subject promptly. "When you have got from a witness what you want, stop!" he had been forever dinging in the ears of his students, and he never forgot it himself.

He glided smoothly into the new line opened by his host's figurative remark.

"Speaking of hurdles, I suppose you ride to hounds?"

"I'm afraid it is *at* them rather than to them," said Harwood. "I'm fond enough of a horse, of

course, but I ride very indifferently. I'm lazy, I think; and the automobile appeals——"

Too late he remembered the butler's warning.

The old man flung up his head, his little, wizened, clean-shaven face puckered like a persimmon, his small eyes snapping, behind the gold-rimmed spectacles that hung far down on his stubby nose.

"Automobiles, did you say!" he exclaimed; "prefer them to God's noblest friend to man!—I'm astonished, sir!—I beg your pardon—but don't let us get on the subject. Automobiles are the invention of hell, and eternal damnation ought to be the portion of those who own them." He drained his glass and held it for another service. "Not you, sir!" he smiled, "as the Harwood and my friend, you are exempt from the condemnation—but no one else, no one else! We were speaking of horses—we have some fine ones in Egerton; indeed, there are a few in your own stables that are hard to get by. We draw Buzzard Hill on Saturday."

"Isn't it rather late for hunting?"

"Not for Egerton, sir; we keep it up until next week—the farmers don't object, you see. We shall look for you at the meet on Saturday, of course."

"I'm very sorry," said Harwood; "I am obliged to be in Northumberland that day."

"My dear sir, surely you are not leaving us so soon! Why you haven't met any one; nor seen anything of this battle-field. It's a rare sight; as

much for what it ought not to be as for what it is. Can't you, at least, remain for Saturday? Buzzard Hill is the sportiest country we have, and there is always a big field out, with plenty of ladies. And, speaking of the ladies, sir, you should see how straight ours ride. None better in the world, sir!—not even in John Bull's little cockle-shell of an island. They inherit it, sir—their parents and their grand-parents hunted these same courses. Oh, you must stay!" with a wave of his hand and his genially persuasive smile; "let Northumberland wait a day or two; it has had you all your life hitherto; you belong here now."

Colleton laughed and shook his head. "I'm sorry, indeed; I should like nothing better than to be in the hunt; and another time I shall, and soon; but I'm under strict engagement to be in Northumberland on Saturday." He looked over his wine-glass at the other. "You wouldn't have me disappoint a very pretty woman, Judge Casson!"

"Far be it from me, sir, to suggest such a lamentable action!" the small gray eyes drilling across the table in intense curiosity. He knew Harwood was not married; but was it, then, that the future mistress of Fairlawn had already been selected? And he had been felicitating himself that the Egerton girls would have a chance. "I thought it was only a business engagement; but, *a lady!* you must go, of course—honor calls!"

"And duty!" Harwood appended.

Judge Casson moved a bit forward in anticipation; under his code, curiosity might not move his tongue.

"Duty," the other went on, "as captain of the tennis team of the Northumberland Golf Club."

The Judge straightened sharply. "I should not excuse you, sir, on that account. It's the lady only that releases you—please tell her so, sir, with my compliments."

"I'll do better than that—I'll let you tell her yourself—she will be here next week."

"Here—next week!" aiming his tones for polite surprise, and succeeding amazingly.

Harwood nodded. It was really unkind the way he played the old man on.

"I'm bringing a house-party back with me on Monday," he said. "She has asked the others, so I don't know who they are; but I can promise you some mighty good lookers—though none so pretty as the lady herself."

"Naturally not, sir, naturally not! I shall be all impatient to greet her."

"And the others, too, Judge; you mustn't overlook them—and you won't, I know—not with your fine eye for the beautiful."

The Judge puckered his lips into a sly smile.

"Trust me for a pretty woman," he returned; "I can spot them as quick as a lying witness on the stand. Not a very happy comparison, maybe, but you understand, sir."

"My dear Judge Casson! you and I are not going to misunderstand each other; you have my hearty invitation now to come out next Monday for dinner, and look them all over, and take your pick."

"Save one, of course."

Colleton laughed. "Nay, save none; if I'm not able to hold my own, I best know it."

"Very true, my boy, very true!—and women are queer birds of passage, and seek strange roosts. I've known not a few who would perch on an old head such as mine, instead of a fine young one like yours. Though mostly, I admit, the old head possessed an extra-corporeal attraction which the young one did not: But with us, my boy, the extra-corporeal situation is reversed."

"But it isn't reversed, I venture to say, with you and the other men of Egerton—and there are pretty girls here, I know. In fact, I saw one this afternoon, who might be called a beauty—slender figure, Titian hair, long lashes, peach-blow cheek. Truly, my dear sir, she was marvellously handsome."

"Yes, yes, I think I can guess who she is—you saw her on the avenue in front, I suppose."

"Not at all, I saw her in my own garden."

The Judge put down his fork so sharply the plate rang.

"In your garden!" he echoed.

Harwood nodded.

"Was there a little, white toy-dog with her?—

Ah, I thought as much. That young woman will always be doing unconventional things—she has Egerton by the ears constantly. If she were not so pretty and so rich, she long ago would have been put into outer darkness."

"The which darkness," Colleton observed, "I rather fancy would very soon have had plenty of Egertonian denizens—of the male persuasion—yourself among them; hey, Judge?"

The Judge's white waistcoat rustled perceptibly.

"You're a sly dog, my boy, a sly dog!—I confess to a slight, a very slight, weakness in that direction—purely paternal, of course—and æsthetic."

"The love of the beautiful in the concrete!" Harwood laughed. "I quite understand; I'm somewhat that way myself. I don't suppose you even know her name!"

"Ho! ho! I see! she flirted with you in your own garden, and yet it's *you* who don't know her name."

"Guilty!" laughed Colleton, "guilty! who is she?"

Judge Casson held up his glass for William's attention; then he arose.

"I give you, sir, your neighbor of The Oaks!—she of the Titian hair and peach-blow cheek—a happy designation, sir:—Mistress Mildred Gascoyne." He drained the champagne to the drop, and replaced the glass. "It is only out of regard for this beautiful crystal that I do not shatter it

on the hearth stones, but I assure you it could not die more worthily."

"It was a pretty custom of our forefathers," said his host, "though rather destructive, and a bit risky late in the evening, when their aim was apt to be a trifle shaky, and their tempers somewhat gusty."

"The younger generation, I fear, has not the sentiment of the old," the Judge returned, shaking his head.

"At all events, we don't run to such picturesque demonstrations—they call for small-clothes and ruffled shirts, dress-swords and powdered hair. But the ladies are the same, my dear Judge—and by *Mistress* Mildred Gascoyne, do you mean wife or maid?"

"Neither, sir—the lady is a widow."

"I see!" said Harwood, "I see! Now I understand something of the havoc she has played among you; beware of the widow, Judge, and particularly a young one with beauty and a bank account. I can imagine her popularity with the women of Egerton isn't of the burning sort, even if she is one of them."

"But she isn't—she is a stranger; she came here only last Autumn, stayed a week or two at one of the hotels, then suddenly rented The Oaks, and spent a lot of money on it; and what with that, and herself, Egerton accepted her, and everybody called. Not that she sought us; in fact, she

held herself rather aloof for a time—and does so still, indeed. She mingles very little with general society, maintaining a—a—salon, if you please, where, however, every one is welcome; and where the ways are a bit freer than some of our people quite approve. Her one passion seems to be horses —*not automobiles*, sir; she never misses a meet; and there are few of us, sir, who can show her the way when the pack is running."

"In every respect," said Harwood, "I seem to be most fortunate in my neighbor. I shall try to be on good terms with her."

"Of course you will, my boy!" the old Judge smiled; "and I haven't the remotest doubt that you will succeed; you are more of her world than we are."

"What is her world?"

The Judge shook his head. "Of her past we know very little, despite the intense interest of some of our good women in it. She never confides in any one—her talk is impersonal as to her antecedents and her ancestors. I am her counsel, and I think, therefore, as intimate with her as any one in Egerton, and yet I say to *you*, sir, I know nothing of her history. Naturally I would not tell it if I did—but I don't—not even her family name. But what I do know, and what all Egerton knows, is that she is a lady—doing some things differently from us, it is true, but a lady none the less—and as such we have accepted her."

"My dear Judge Casson!" Harwood protested, "I meant no reflection upon Mrs. Gascoyne, I assure you—I was simply interestedly curious——"

"I understand, my boy, I never misunderstood—but you know the saying anent a pretty face and an old fool—and so I like to break a lance for her, even though I know it is against a windmill."

Harwood passed this opening for further chaff.

"Really, sir," he said; "if these marvels continue I shall think I have eaten hashish. Out of the city of mushrooms and modernity, I enter, all unsuspecting, this atmosphere of calm and poise—this house of a century's dignity—this garden of the past; and now—is added the beautiful woman of mystery."

"Fascination, thy name is Fairlawn!" the Judge incanted, waving his fork as though it were a wand. "What other spell shall Merlin weave?"

"None, O prince of magicians!" laughed Colleton—"else shall I be forsworn on Saturday."

"And I shall lose all chance to see the lady of Northumberland—enough! I necromance no more this night. I return to my proper avocation, and this marvellous champagne."

The butler was just entering from the pantry and so did not catch the cue.

"William," said Harwood, "the wine."

The old Judge turned and looked at the negro, over his glasses.

"'*William!*' did you call him, sir?" he asked,

" that good for nothing young nigger! His name is *Cæsarion;* don't let him start any of his high-falutinness on you, sir. ' William,' indeed! Pretty soon he will be copying the mannerisms of the smug-faced white monkey at The Oaks. What in the devil Mrs. Gascoyne sees in having a mechanical toy for a butler, I can't imagine! Emulate old Cæsar, your father, boy; he understood his business —and so do you, too, if you don't get above it. . . . Pardon my interfering with one of your household, sir," he said, as the son of Cæsar and Cleopatra took the chance to escape with some dishes, " but I feel a little responsible for these servants until you get your hand in on them. A negro is a queer creature, sir, and if I, who have been master here lately, you know, had let that change of name slide by without remark, there would have been trouble in reversing it, and discipline would have suffered sadly."

" But I'm not so sure I don't prefer the new name to the old," said Harwood.

" Very good, my boy, very good! but it's you who must change it, not he. The negro is a child, sir—easy to manage if you understand him; worthless and trifling if you don't. And as he is handled, is he either the best servant in the world, or the worst. Bear in mind, sir, that, as a general principle, he has neither gratitude nor resentment—and further, that where he is accorded a privilege beyond the regular rules, he must be made to realize

that it comes as a favor, and by your grace, not by his right. And this Cæsarion—William, if you wish—is just the same, despite the smattering of college, which your predecessor in some unfortunate moment inflicted upon him—and us; for we have felt the effect upon every black in the town; a certain uplift, as it were, which unsettles them, and yet is hard to reach in a disciplining way."

"William has told me he thinks his education was likely a mistake—that God meant the negro for a servant and learning only unfitted him."

"Exactly!—the boy has sense—he wouldn't be old Cæsar's son if he hadn't; he will come out all right, sir, if you don't spoil him; but he will never be the equal of his father—there, sir, was a servant to delight the soul. But enough of this subject!—it will interest you more when you have had a little further experience with the race; then, pray consult me."

Near midnight, when Harwood escorted his guest to the piazza, the ripple of a piano came from somewhere in the darkness; the Judge raised his hand, and they listened.

"It is she—at The Oaks!" he said. "She plays divinely; you must hear her."

"I hope to," said Colleton, "to-morrow at five—by special appointment. Is there any particular subject the mysterious lady bars?"

"Yes!" said the Judge, as he climbed into his runabout, "husbands, sir, husbands!"

IV

MILADY OF THE OAKS

THERE was no date in the corner-stone of The Oaks, and none was needed; the architecture fixed it with all the accuracy of figures. It belonged to the brief period of the mansard-roof, dormer-window, central-tower atrocity, that was so soon overtaken by the Queen Anne debauch of angles and frothy, scroll-saw decoration.

It stood a trifle further back from the roadway than did Fairlawn, behind a hedge of evergreen, and a clump of fine large oaks that towered over the lawn and wrapped the house in shade, and also in a dignity quite unfitting to either itself or its builders. The latter had been overbalanced by a sudden acquisition of small wealth, and, as usual, had run to a residence and expensive habits; with the result, that when the mansard-roof got to leaking—which in such houses always happened soon, and frequently—it required pinching to pay for the incessant repairs. And so the social coup the family had planned—even in Egerton they did not "belong"—was never struck; and after a time they sold the place at a sacrifice and moved away to another town. Since then, there had been several owners; the last being the Judsons, who were glad to rent to Mrs. Gascoyne, while they went off for a

year's experience in European *pensions*. With the Judsons, The Oaks had at last moved into the charmed circle its builders had aimed at and missed; and while it had effected no alteration in its ugly exterior, it had worked wonders in the taste and character of the interior arrangements and furnishings. It was the interior that had attracted Mrs. Gascoyne; that, and the turf, and the trees, and the situation on the ridge.

And it was on the lawn under the oaks, that Harwood found her, when he came to pay his neighborly visit the following afternoon.

"It has been a long wait until five o'clock!" he said as he bowed over her hand, with that naturally deferential graciousness, which appeals so to women, and which few men seem to possess. He waved his stick toward the town, where the clock in the court-house tower was just striking the hour. "You see, my impatience has made me over-prompt."

"And yet, men are not curious!" she laughed.

"Curious!" Harwood echoed. "I, curious?"

"Yes, curious—to have a good look at me in the bright light of day—that is why I came out here; indeed," with a quick glance through the long lashes, "I was half-minded to be kind, and to send for you this morning instead of obliging you to wait."

"Then you do not object to curiosity?"

She smiled. "If I did, I should have fled from Egerton long ago. Besides, there are degrees of

curiosity; and yours is of the non-impertinent sort, the languid, indifferent curiosity of the well-bred and blasé, which it is, I suppose, rather a compliment even to have aroused."

Harwood bent over the little dog, who was lying on the rug between them.

"Chum," said he, "you know your mistress best, which would you rather she shouldn't call you—blasé or impertinent?"

"Tell him, there never has been occasion to call you either," she answered, while the caniche smiled up at her and spoke softly. "And ask him what Judge Casson told him about your mistress, last evening. I suppose there was champagne at dinner—ah, I see;" as she caught a faint gleam in Colleton's eyes, "the combination of the Harwood heir and bubbles was more than he could withstand. And the dear old Judge is such an ardent friend; I can imagine him drinking all sorts of toasts in my praise, and telling you all sorts of foolishness. He wouldn't act so with any one but you, and in the joy of your coming." She looked at him with a frank smile and put out her hand in quick appeal. "And now please forget all about it, and let us begin just where we left off last evening, at the postern gate."

He made no move to take her hand. He knew it was not meant for him to take.

"There is no reason that I should forget what Judge Casson said of you," he answered.

"Oh, I know!" she exclaimed, "but I don't care for a halo so early in life; it really doesn't fit."

Harwood glanced at the gleaming hair, where a slender shaft of sunlight danced in flame, and smiled.

"Don't say it!" she cried, "don't say it! I'm sick of that aureole business—and I hate red hair! do you hear? I hate red hair." She sprang up and crossed to the tea table. "Will you have lemon, or cream?"

"If I may," said he, "I will not have anything."

"You mean you wish it plain?"

"No. I mean I don't wish it at all."

She turned and regarded him with a smile.

"Do you know," she said, "I rather thought so —you don't look like one of the cult."

"Thank you," said Harwood, "thank you heartily! I assure you I'm not of the cult. When I see an able-bodied young man sipping afternoon tea, I am perfectly sure that, in secret, he either plays with paper-dolls or crochets."

She laughed. "I know it affects many men that way—yet, really, it's not absolutely indefensible."

"Not in old men and weaklings, may be; but otherwise, nothing excuses except hunger; and no man has any justification for hunger at tea hour."

"He might be thirsty."

"Then let him take a man's drink, water or something stronger!—besides, who ever quenched thirst with hot tea!"

"You have no objection to iced-tea?"

"Have you iced-tea here now?"

"No."

"Did you ever see it served, as of course, at such times?"

"I don't recall it," she smiled; "but I have seen something of this sort,"—and she opened a shelf in the table, disclosing a syphon and some bottles.

"Which, and when?" she said.

"Rye, if you please . . . thank you—I'll fix it."

She waved him off, and shot in the soda with an easy hand.

"There, that's better, I know—you and tea don't fit, I should have been surprised had you taken it. It's different in England; there it's a national custom; here it's still a fad, proper enough for women, but an effeminate affectation for men."

"Chum," said Harwood, "I believe your mistress and your neighbor are going to hit it off very well." He drew out his cigarette case. "May I smoke? . . . Will you?"

"If it is unmanly to drink afternoon tea, isn't it unwomanly to smoke cigarettes?" she asked quizzically.

"Not for you; it depends on the woman, and how she does it, and where."

"Do you know," she laughed, "that pleases me quite as much as my tea remark pleased you. Of course, I'll have a cigarette now—only, for heaven's sake, tell it not in Egerton!"

"It would be shocked, I suppose," he remarked, watching her deftly draw the flame to the tip of the cigarette and light it evenly and without smearing the wrapper; "and particularly if it knew what that sort of dexterity implies."

She blew a smoke-cloud at him. "You observe quite too closely—I shall be warned."

"Instead," said he, "tell me something of this Egerton—give me a line on it."

"It's like any small town; only more so, in some respects, and less so in others."

"The difficulty is I know nothing of country towns; I've always imagined them stupid and uncomfortable and depressing."

"As drawn in the so-called realistic stories!" she laughed. "Well, such places may exist in the imaginations of a few writers—usually women, I'm sorry to admit—who are suffering with morbid-mania in its worst form, but I'm fairly familiar with small towns, and I've yet to find any such as some of the magazines would foist on us. The trouble about this present realism is, that it's confined to an exaggeration of the unpleasant and sordid; and the more depressing you make it, the more it seems to appeal to the editors. Take Egerton, for example; a small town—less than four thousand people—and yet it is full of romance."

Harwood smiled rather incredulously. "Romance in a village!—where every one is known, and a new suit is spotted instantly, even by the dogs!"

"Why, don't you know, m'sieur, that you yourself are a romance—and a very interesting one—to Egerton; and that Fairlawn is simply steeped in it?"

"Good Lord! I, a romance! How can I quit it?"

"By going away, and passing Fairlawn on to the next heir—or by marrying."

"And which would you recommend?"

She regarded him with a thoughtful smile.

"I should think that, even to you, marriage would be preferable to losing such a place as Fairlawn," she said. "And there are any number of girls down yonder, who would be overjoyed to be its mistress."

"Good," he laughed, "good! I shall go down to-morrow morning and look them over—or maybe you would suggest one in particular that likely should be satisfactory."

She shook her head. "I leave it to Judge Casson; he is quite competent—and you will need aid—there are quantities of pretty ones."

"Any with dogs like Chum?"

She gave him a look of teasing fascination.

"Not unless *I* took him there!" she said.

"Will you?"

She laughed; this time the soft, infectious laugh that had stirred Harwood's memory the evening before, in the garden.

"I quite forgot, m'sieur, to-morrow is the morn-

ing for Chum's bath; we could not go. I am sorry!"

Harwood flung up his hands.

"Romance!" he exclaimed, "romance that ends in a bath-tub! I pray you, milady, may I have another high-ball?"

He watched her critically while she was preparing it. There was no denying her beauty—it had been evident enough in the dusk of the garden, now it was manifest beyond even a jealous rival's sneer. Small wonder that she had turned the heads of masculine Egerton, and that Judge Casson had wanted to shiver the glass that toasted her. And what was such a woman doing here, in this quiet little town!—a woman of twenty-five, surely not more, with a face and figure and carriage and walk that were—well, like no woman he had ever seen, save only Evelyn Leicester. What a picture the two would make together! and in that wonderful drawing-room at Fairlawn, under the great chandelier of many candles, amid the mirrors and the portraits——

She turned suddenly—and again came the soft, infectious laugh.

"Have you seen a ghost?" she asked.

"No," he said; "not a ghost—a vision—and a memory."

"Goodness! I should never have thought it of you!"

"Nor I. It's the touch of Fairlawn upon me, I

reckon. Tell me, have we met before—I mean, haven't I seen you somewhere—there is something very familiar in your laugh; I am sure——" It flashed upon him—it was the laugh of her of the Grand Canal.

"You have recalled!" she said. "Was it I?"

"I have recollected where I heard the laugh, but somehow your face does not quite fit it—you understand?"

"Yes," she smiled, "I understand."

"It was in Venice," he went on. "You have been there?"

"Only once—last year."

He shook his head. "It was two years ago."

"And that, I suppose, was the 'memory';—what was the 'vision'?"

"You!" he said; "you and another."

She caught her breath, and a frown of agitation tarried a moment between her eyes.

"I do not understand!" she exclaimed. "Was it a vision of the future or of the past?"

"Of the future—I'll show it to you next week."

"But the other! who is the other?"

"I'm to have a house-party at Fairlawn; the other will be there."

"Man or woman?" she insisted.

"Wait," he laughed, "wait! foreknowledge does not run with visions."

"And where, m'sieur," she asked, "is the place of the vision?"

"In the drawing-room at Fairlawn, next Monday evening, when you come to dine."

"Am I to take that as an invitation?"

"Until I can send you a formal one under hand and seal."

She was thoughtful for a space.

"I do not go out very much; not even among the Egertonians," she explained. "I think I would better decline."

"I won't accept it!" said he. "You are not likely to know any one there—why shouldn't you come?"

She gave him a questioning look, and he understood.

"Indeed, I wish I could tell you who they will be, but I can't—you see, I'm not inviting them; I delegated that to another—*the other*, in fact."

"They come Monday, you say?"

"Monday morning—I shall bring them back with me from Northumberland."

"Well," she said, "I'll accept—if I may have the privilege to change my mind any time before the dinner hour."

"Assuredly, milady!" he laughed; "that is only your prerogative."

He knew that what she really intended was to have a look at his house-party *before* the dinner hour, and that upon the result of the look her coming would depend. On the whole, there seemed to be plenty of romance at The Oaks itself!

V

THE DOUBTFUL ONE ON THE LIST

Harwood lingered at Egerton until the last train out, on Friday afternoon, that would enable him to reach Northumberland the following morning. He would not have gone at all, but for his engagement with Mrs. Leicester for the tennis tournament, and his obligation, as host, to bring down the house-party. He regretted now that he had ever suggested the latter; much rather would he have remained alone at Fairlawn, to loiter through the day over the old letters, and records, and books in the library; to wander from room to room admiring the tapestries and paintings, the Chippendale, Heppelwhite and Sheraton; to dream for hours at a time in the garden, amid the soft fragrance of the fresh-blown Cherokee roses, and sometimes—when he dropped asleep—amid the belles and beaux of former days. Sentimental? No—simply sensitive to the gentle influence of the place, the call of the Past, the *dolce far niente* which he had never known hitherto, and which, in the rather listless and wandering life he had been leading, these later years, appealed to him as that which he was really seeking, and yet had never found.

He had dined with Judge Casson, there to meet

a few of those whom it befitted him to know and his host to entertain. And he had found them very delightful indeed; and while their small talk was not so facile as his own, he quickly noted that in a general knowledge of affairs they were quite up to him, and in matters of science and literature, maybe a bit beyond. Naturally, in world-acquaintance and familiarity with the life of the Now, he was alone at the board; but just as naturally he did not parade it. It is ever the widest traveller, and the most thorough cosmopolite, who talks the least, while his one-trip-to-Europe brother plumes and ruffles himself as the lord of all experience.

But what impressed Harwood most, was that they all received him not as a stranger but as one of them. It was as though he had known them from childhood; and he marvelled at it even while it won him, having yet to learn that, with these people, to be of their blood, however remote in degree, is to be of them, and that to be vouched for by a friend, is to be their friend, too.

He had not seen Mrs. Gascoyne, again. He had sent her flowers from the garden, the morning after their tea together; and on Friday afternoon he went over to say he was off for Northumberland, and to remind her of the dinner date for the following Monday; but she was gone for a ride to the mountains and would not return before evening, he was told. So he sent her more flowers, and went down to the station, and the dirty train that

pounded very slowly across to the Capital, where he got an express and a Pullman which put him in Northumberland for breakfast.

He took the noon suburban out to Heights, half an hour down the river, and chanced upon Mrs. Leicester doing the same.

"I thought you would motor down!" he said, taking the place she made for him on the seat beside her.

"I had to do some shopping," she explained; "but I sent the car ahead; it will be at the station. When did you come in?"

"This morning."

She turned and looked him over critically.

"Well, you seem to have been able to stay the limit without any noticeable hurt!" she laughed. "I even imagine you have put on a pound or two."

"Shouldn't wonder in the least!—Cleopatra is a marvel;—Cleopatra's the cook."

"What a tumble!" Mrs. Leicester exclaimed. "I suppose the butler is Cæsar, and the page Cæsarion."

"Was—Cæsar is dead, and Cæsarion is now the butler."

"Do you mean it? really!"

He nodded. "The rest of the force are not so distinguished historically, but they all are mighty competent."

"When a man approves of the servants, it's usually rather unnecessary to ask if he likes the place—but do you?"

"The truth is, I'm quite fascinated by Fairlawn," he answered. "For the first time in my life, I have appreciated that home could mean something more than a place to eat, and to sleep, and to meet one's family. Call the big residences of Northumberland, or these garish, imitation chateaux down here at the Heights, homes! Lord, it's ridiculous! They may be homes in a century or so; now, they are only megaphones for their owners' wealth. Do you know, Evelyn, I'm beginning to understand something of the Englishman's affection for his family-seat—the old manor house or castle that has been theirs for generations."

Most women would have twitted him about his recent scorn of sentiment, but Mrs. Leicester steered wide of any such mistake.

"And all this is due to Fairlawn!" she said. "Is it then so very beautiful?"

"Yes, I think it is; but its calm dignity and inherent gentility are what appeal to me. And the marvellous garden, that one wants never to leave!—You see, Evelyn, I must be daffy on it when flowers appeal to me, who hardly know a carnation from a rose."

She smiled at him frankly, amused yet surprised.

"It must be a wonderful place, this Fairlawn of yours," she said; "I am glad I shall see it so soon."

"So am I—*you* will appreciate it. Who are going?"

"I asked only nine:—Mrs. St. George, for respectability and the proprieties."

He nodded. "Eminent for both, and an all-round good chaperon. Approved!"

"Nancy Willoby, . . . Hilda Gordon, . . . Rosalind Spottswood, . . . and Jane Heyward."

"Bully, my dear, bully! Egerton will think I'm entertaining a beauty-show. How in the world did you get them?"

"Get them!" she laughed. "The trouble was how to get only them. The girls are crazy to see you in the rôle of host and housekeeper. I've made more enemies in this matter than I can win back in the rest of my days. I was on the point of sending you a list of the applicants and letting you shoulder your own burdens."

"Then there wouldn't have been a house-party!" he replied. "And now for the men—Tony Wilberforce for one, I fancy."

"Of course—Tony is always essential; the others are Leigh Burgoyne."

He nodded approval.

"Talbot Vanbrugh."

Another nod.

"Henry Landor."

This time, the nod was a bit delayed.

"He is to be charged against Hilda Gordon," Mrs. Leicester explained. "She insisted upon him; says she has an old score to settle, and thinks this is just the opportunity. Don't you like Landor?"

"Oh, I reckon he is all right; only, he strikes me as being a trifle new for the crowd."

"Then I'm sorry I let her persuade me. I told her he didn't belong, that he was hardly one of us as yet; and she said that even though he had been here only a few years and not much was known of his antecedents, yet he went every place (which is true), and that most of the men could take lessons from him in good manners."

"Which is also true!" Harwood laughed. "And there is no denying he is handsome. So don't give it another thought, my dear, I've nothing against him; indeed I know him only very superficially." (He might have added that it was the only way he had cared to know him.) "If he misbehave, we will let Hilda discipline him. I assume, now, that Tony is intended particularly for Mrs. Heyward—on the theory, doubtless, that he is absolutely safe even for a pretty, young married-woman, whose husband is on the other side of the world with a year's sea-service still ahead."

"The only sorrow I have now," she went on—"since you have been so good about Landor, is——"

The train stopped with a jerk.

"This is Heights!" said Harwood, hastily. "Come along, and tell me your troubles on the way up."

The platform and drive had the usual Saturday gathering of children and pony-carts, loafers, villagers and motor-cars. A bunch of passengers

projected themselves into this aggregation, to emerge, more or less quickly, as their particular luck or conveyance managed. Mrs. Leicester's new Maja stood well apart from the crowd, and she and Harwood were promptly aboard and away.

"Now," said he, as they went slowly through the village, in deference to the local speed ordinance and its heartless enforcement by the authorities, "what was this sorrow I was about to help you bear, when the unfeeling train interrupted?"

"You must bear it yourself!" she laughed—"for my part, I'm quite content; my sorrow was for you—that I had not been able to include in 'the beauty-show,' the lady of the Grand Canal."

"It isn't necessary," he replied. "She has a very good substitute down at Egerton; an actual double, indeed, in one particular."

She swept his face with a quick, sidelong glance. Just how much had this substitute to do with his sudden fondness for the ancestral home, which, hitherto, he had neglected and scorned?

"Have they gondolas in Egerton?" she asked.

"Not unless they are on wheels. Are you *very* curious?" he teased.

"Of course I am! Tell me about her."

"No—wait until you see her—she will dine with us Monday evening."

"At least, Colleton, tell me how she is the double of the Venetian lady."

"In her laugh. It is tone for tone."

"She is an Egertonian?"

He shook his head. "She has lived there only a short while."

"And her name?"

"Gascoyne — Mildred Gascoyne — age about twenty-five—present occupation, a widow."

"If she is sensible, she will stick to it!" Mrs. Leicester laughed. "Who is she, and who was she?"

"I don't know—no one knows in Egerton—nor where she came from, nor anything else of her history."

"And yet she is received there?"

"Yes; as old Judge Casson put it:—'She is a lady'."

She looked up at him quizzically.

"Does she live *very* close to Fairlawn?" she asked.

"On the next place." He smiled at her condescendingly. "You're clever, Evelyn, but you miss it now—I was there but once, and I saw her but twice."

"And I shall take care you don't see her too often while I'm at Fairlawn. I've promised myself a nice, comfortable time with you, down there. We haven't had one since—since I made a fool of myself with Jack Leicester; so beware how you go straying off after this woman of an unknown past and a fetching laugh."

"Oh, but you should hear the laugh! and see

the Titian hair, and the slender figure—like yours, Evelyn—and the——"

"Oh, be quiet!" she exclaimed; "I shall see them soon enough—and don't you dare let her see you prefer her to me, when I'm there!"

He leaned back in the corner and chuckled.

"Did you ever know me to prefer another woman when you were near?" he asked.

She gave him a smile, half mocking, half pleased. "I never knew you to prefer any woman when I'm near—not even me."

Again came the chuckle. "Then what fear of the lady-with-the-laugh?"

"Just because of the laugh; it suggests that other woman."

"The next prettiest, *after* you!"

"Is Mrs. Gascoyne *after* me?"

"Well, you see, in the other instance, both you and Venice are brunettes, but in this case"—surveying her with elaborate deliberation—"I should say it's largely a question of preference for type. Your hair is black, hers is red, your——"

"Never mind the items!—which type do you prefer?"

"It depends entirely upon which happens to have the prettiest girl at the particular time I'm interested in types. At this moment, I much prefer the brunette."

"And down at Egerton you prefer the blonde?"

They had swung around the last curve and hit

the straight-away for the Club, where neither grade nor speed ordinances interfered, and with a flash and a whir they were under the porte-cochere.

"*Did* prefer the blonde?" he amended, with well assumed gravity, as he helped her down. "But I can see trouble ahead for next week."

"And so can I!" she smiled, leaning the briefest interval on his hand.

A tall, well-set-up man, apparently in the late thirties, who had been sitting on the circular end of the piazza, near the drive, got up hurriedly and met them at the stairway.

He bowed over Mrs. Leicester's glove, in a manner like nothing so much as Harwood's own, then held out his hand to Colleton.

"My dear Harwood," he said, "thank you very much for the bid!—I appreciate it rather more than you may believe."

"Nonsense, Landor!" (it was the first time he had ever omitted the formal prefix) "and besides, I'm not the one to thank; there (nodding after Evelyn Leicester, who had gone on) is where the credit lies. I didn't know, until a few minutes ago, who were asked. I only hope you'll have a good time. It will be rather quiet, I fear, but we shall find something to do. Just now I'm thirsty—come along."

If he had made up the list, Landor would not have been included, pretty Hilda Gordon's wishes, notwithstanding; but Harwood never borrowed

trouble from either past or future, so he adopted the situation and tried to be properly cordial and friendly. That Landor should accept an invitation to be the house-guest of one who, he must have realized, had always held him a bit at length, was not especially to his credit; yet in these days Harwood knew that much must not be expected of the taste and the method of the social climbers. The canons of good breeding are not for them, when they raise their golden ladders and begin the toilsome and expensive ascent.

And Landor was a climber—not quite of the usual sort, but a climber none the less. He had come to Northumberland two years before, as the representative of an Eastern firm of bond-brokers. This had brought him speedily into rather close contact with some of the large capitalists and money-interests, and his fine appearance and address had quickly won him acquaintanceship. He seemed to have an ample income—quite willing to spend it and to hazard it—and being a discriminating and politic loser he had straightway become popular with a certain class. It was not they at whom he aimed, but they were necessary as a starter; and through them he went into the big business club. They would have put him up at a country club of second rate, but there he was wise—he declined. The Manufacturers would not retard him—the *hoi aristoi* were in it, too; but when it came to the social clubs, it was for him the Northumberland

and the Heights; and he knew that nothing was such a handicap to the stranger as membership in one of the common herd's.

So he bided his time and climbed, cautiously, smilingly, adroitly, persistently; in a year, he had crossed the walls and was amid the hedges of the various cliques. It was typical of the man that he chose the tightest of the hedges to besiege. And now he was safely inside. It was his charming manners and good looks that had caught the women—and his being unattached and so always on call when they needed him. There may have been a few of the old conservatives who still regarded him dubiously, but this invitation to Fairlawn would convert even them, he knew. It meant the end of his campaign. Henceforth, his position was assured. It was too vital an opportunity to be put aside for any such trifling scruple as that he might not know Harwood sufficiently well to be his guest; it really was a matter for Harwood—and if Harwood were at last willing to admit him to intimacy, he had no pride that would oblige him to decline.

In the café, Vanbrugh joined them, and for a while the talk was tennis. There was plenty of rivalry between the two clubs, in the way of sports, and the men were, maybe, a little too ready to make books on their teams. A boy had just brought to Harwood a list of the Heights pairs, and he fell to studying it, and then to arranging the matches, which, as visiting captain, was his

privilege. When he finished, Landor had gone to answer a telephone call, and Tony Wilberforce was in his place.

Harwood pushed the paper across.

"Hello, Wilby! didn't hear you come up," he said. "You and Van take a look and make your kicks—make them now, not after the game." He raised his hand to a waiter. "Let me have the card, please!"

Vanbrugh and Wilberforce together ran over the list, while Harwood searched for his luncheon.

"We refuse to kick," said Tony, handing back the paper, "as the hospital report says, 'you've done as well as can be expected under the circumstances.' What are we going to eat?"

"Better wait for Landor," Vanbrugh observed. "He said he would be back."

Wilberforce's cigarette went very red on the tip, and he blew a cloud of smoke at the big stein on the mantle above him.

"Harwood!" he said, "it's none of my particular affair, I know, but, between the three of us, just why, in the name of Balaam, have you included Landor in this crowd next week?"

"He may be useful," Harwood laughed; "I heard a woman say recently, that all of us could learn manners from him."

"Just so! He's the devil among the petticoats, with his bow and his smile; but I didn't imagine they had caught you."

"I rather fancied you liked Landor," said Vanbrugh; "you are very civil to him."

"I'm obliged to be; one meets him everywhere, and he is always in the game."

"What Tony objects to is being housed-up with him for days," Harwood explained. "I quite understand his point of view."

"Nonsense, Colleton!" Wilberforce cut in, "I don't object. I can get along with Landor very well. What astonishes me is, that finical you should choose him for a guest."

"Maybe I didn't choose him," Harwood smiled. "Maybe I'm responsible only for the bid."

"Huh!" Wilberforce ejaculated. "The silly petticoats again!"

"Shut up!" said Vanbrugh; "he's coming."

Wilberforce glanced up, without raising his head, and watched Landor coming down the room.

"Handsome!" he muttered, "damned handsome, I admit! but the yellow's underneath, all right—and some time it's going to come through."

VI

AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRWAY

Mrs. Gascoyne closed the magazine and laid it on the bench.

"There, Chum, I've finished 'The Fourth Dimension,' and Heaven be praised!" she exclaimed. "I don't understand it any more than you do, and neither does the man who wrote it."

The dog, lying on her gown at her feet, looked up with a curiously peering expression and wagged his stumpy tail.

"And I don't approve of the 'Dimension' anyway—you might stray into it, Chum, and I never find you, even though you were right beside me." She dropped her hand and stroked the soft white hair with the tips of her fingers. "Do you know, little chap," she said presently, "that this is our last visit in this beautiful garden—at least for a long, long time? The ogre comes back to-day; the good-looking stranger you saw here last week, and whom we both liked—that is, whom you liked. I liked him because you did—and because he seemed to like you. He is coming here to-day, Chum; with a lot of friends from Northumberland; and that is the place you and I don't care for, you know."

The dog smiled up at his mistress, and springing on the bench nestled close against her.

"The ogre's home has always been in Northumberland," she explained, while Chum watched her as though he thoroughly understood; "but now, I suppose, he will be here a good deal; and if he persist in bringing a lot of people with him, you and I, boy, will have to move away. We mustn't take the chance of——" she put her face close to her pet's fluffy ear, and the rest of the words were lost.

The long blast of a locomotive whistle, from below the ridge, aroused her. She looked at her watch.

"Come, Chum!" she said, "we must be going—the ogre is on that train. Say good-by to the roses,"—she held him up to a cluster and he sniffed them with evident pleasure—"and I'll take some along for us."

She put him down and gathered a bunch of Cherokees. Then she went slowly toward the postern, pausing for farewell at mock-orange and honey-suckle, violet and rose, and finally turning at the grille, for a backward look and a final hand-wave.

"*Adios!*" she said, "*adios!*—and don't forget me!"

She stayed a moment longer, then closed the gate and went quickly through the grass to the rear entrance of The Oaks.

"Come along, Chum!" she said, as he loitered,

reading the latest tale of the scent, through the sensitive, black little nose, "come along, or we shall miss them."

Chum left the tale unfinished and scampered ahead, giving the cook an impudent bark of greeting, as she called to him from the kitchen door, but quite ignoring the sad-faced, droopy-eyed butler who admitted them. Brown did not like him, and he knew it.

From a window on the second floor, Mrs. Gascoyne looked out toward the town. A cloud of red dust, near the forks of the road, was the background for a big automobile. She picked up a field glass from a nearby table, and levelled it.

"Yes," she thought, "he is driving; one woman beside him, and five in the tonneau—where are the men?"

The car disappeared behind a long row of trees, flashed out for a moment, then passed under the ridge and was hid.

She looked again toward the town. A station-wagon was just at its edge, three men in it. She recognized the big sorrel as one of the Fairlawn horses.

"Ah!" she said, watching the trio eagerly, her nervousness betrayed by the unsteady glass. The horn called sharply, as the motor turned into the avenue, and she stepped aside, out of vision.

Harwood was running slow, to give his guests the full value of this first view of the old house,

but he himself was looking toward The Oaks. In the spirit of mischief, she let him see her, just long enough to send him a smile and a nod, and not long enough for him to respond. She gave no glance at those with him—women were not interesting her at this moment, to-night would be time sufficient for them, if she went to the dinner—and she thought, now, she was going.

She turned back to the road—the station-wagon was not visible; it was under the hill. Presently came the tramp of the sorrel on the telford, and as he went by she scanned the three men, using the glass even at that short range. Then she laid it aside, and laughed. He was not there!—of course. What a silly, foolish, timid child she was to let such an idea possess her. Northumberland was one of the great cities of the nation, huge and populous—and what chance was there that *he* should be picked from among the mass, and flung down in this quiet, little town!

"Chum, your mistress is losing her nerve!" she said; "pretty soon, she will begin to flinch at a fence or a ditch. And when that time comes, boy, she will take to knitting and caps. The caps, at least, will be welcome; they will hide some of this horrid hair."

She went down to the library, and wrote a note to Colleton Harwood that she would not decline for this evening. As she finished it, the telephone rang and she answered it herself from her desk.

It was Judge Casson. He had business in a village near the mountain, and would she do him the honor of accompanying him—riding or driving, as she preferred.

She would be glad to ride, she answered,—she often went with him on such occasions—and having directed Brown to deliver the note after luncheon hour, she went off to get into saddle-dress.

And so she missed the Master of Fairlawn when, in mid-afternoon, he strolled over to acknowledge the note, in person, and to say that he would send the car for her. Maybe he anticipated another little chat under the trees, and maybe he was just a trifle disappointed at missing it. As it was, he went in and left a line for her; then he returned to the Hall, to be dragged to a Bridge table, where the cards persisted in such a riot for him, that when the game ended, in bare time to dress for dinner, he had won every rubber, and, stranger still, Landor had lost them all, and owed him a balance rather amazingly large, while Mrs. Leicester and Hilda Gordon quit practically even.

It was the sort of luck that would strain the sweetest temper, and Harwood had observed Landor with curious attention. But never once did the smile of calm and polite indifference forsake him; and he met the fusillade of no-trumps, and aces by the hundred, with a good-nature marvellous in its steadiness. At the end, with a laughing remark about the propriety of losing to the host, if one

had to lose, he drew out a check and was about to fill it in, when Harwood stopped him.

"Make a memorandum of the amount," he said; "you will doubtless have it all back, with plenty more, when the party breaks—we will settle then. . . . I wonder,"—to Mrs. Leicester, as he accompanied her to the stairway,—"if they are his natural manners or only his parade ones. I have never played with him before, and now I can appreciate Tony's famous *bon mot*, that Landor is so perfect he must be artificial."

"Then he is marvellously constructed!" she laughed; "one doesn't hear the machinery work—and it seems never to be out of order."

"Well, so long as he keep it in order while here, it is none of my affair; though Tony swears that a yellow streak is sure to come through some day."

"What's that you said about me?" Wilberforce demanded, rounding the doorway in front of them.

"Nothing that is fit to repeat!" Harwood retorted. "Go and dress!"

"Instantly, my lord, instantly!—but first, pray tell me who is the Diana you have for neighbor—she of the copper hair and wondrous face and figure."

"A Mrs. Gascoyne."

"Married! Damn!—And is that wizened-faced old guy her husband?"

"The lady is a widow!"

"No! no! you don't mean it! Well, just watch

your Uncle Tony, now! When will you present me, my friend, in the morning?"

Harwood shook his head.

"Oh, come now, you stingy beggar! don't keep her to yourself—take me over after breakfast."

"It won't be necessary; you can go alone, if she will receive you. Mrs. Gascoyne is dining with us this evening."

Wilberforce's look of surprise changed to a knowing smile.

"Did you hear that, Evelyn?" he asked. "Our friend was here a week, *alone*—and, now, neighbor Diana 'is dining with us this evening'."

Mrs. Leicester laughed down on them from near the landing.

"I'm sorry for you, Tony!" she said, "awfully sorry; but believe me, it's really no use. You haven't a shadow of a chance in that direction, not a shadow." She looked at Harwood quizzically. "And I know—don't I, Colleton?"

"I'm sorry for you, myself, old man!" Harwood sympathized, turning away for a look at the table and a last word with William; "but cheer up, and get fascinating; I'm going to put you beside her."

Half an hour later, on his way down stairs, he met Evelyn Leicester in the upper hall, and halted in amazed admiration.

"You like me?" she asked, with a bit of a curtsy.

She was in yellow—soft, shimmering, canary

silk, that clung to her slender figure in suggestive yet tantalizingly unrevealing lines.

Even Harwood knew that yellow is the most trying color a woman can wear, and that few, very few, dared to venture it.

"You're a wonder, Evelyn!" he said, taking her hand in the old familiar way of former years—before Jack Leicester—and holding it, as they descended. "I tremble for poor, old Casson; you will bowl him over like a pin—you're between him and Fordyce."

"Who is Fordyce?" she asked.

"The Judge's nephew—and a very decent sort, I think. By the bye, Casson says he is woman-proof; why don't you discipline him?"

She smiled rather whimsically.

"Don't you think there is someone rather nearer, who needs to be disciplined?" she replied.

He regarded her in amused gravity.

"If it were not impossible, don't you think you would have disciplined me long ago?" he asked.

"You mean I have tried?" she demanded.

He waved his hand toward her reflection, in the tall mirror that filled the wall near the drawing-room door.

"Of course not!—if it were possible, do you fancy *she* would need to try?" he answered.

She stopped and looked up at him thoughtfully.

"Do you know, Colleton, sometimes I've been almost tempted to try!"

"Simply to show your power?"

"I don't know—that, in part, maybe—but more, a selfish desire to keep you for myself. I don't want to give you to another woman."

"And yet, the other day, you were urging me to marry!" he smiled.

"Yes—when I hadn't any notion there was danger."

"And now you think there is danger?"

She shrugged the pretty shoulders, that shone quite free above the yellow gown.

"I don't think—yet; I'm only apprehensive. I'll wait until I see the Lady of the Laugh."

"I am going for her, now, and I'm a bit late. There come Judge Casson and Fordyce! Hold up, please, Evelyn, and take charge of them."

He went over to the doorway, and brought the two directly across to her.

"I really feel as though we were old friends, Judge Casson," she said, giving him her hand, and smiling a greeting to Fordyce over his uncle's bent head.

"You do me vast honor, my lady—to me, old friends are now the only reason for life," the Judge answered, bowing again, and sweeping her with his appreciative eye. "And as for you, sir!" turning upon Harwood, "if you had not gone back to Northumberland for that tennis game, you should have deserved outer darkness henceforth and forever."

"Thank you, Judge Casson! now we *are* old friends," laughed Evelyn, "for, quite in confidence, I think he was minded not to come."

"The young dog!—you should punish him well——" He broke off. Down the stairs were trailing Nancy Willoby and Rosalind Spottswood, and back of them Jane Heyward.

"By my faith, Harwood!" he ejaculated, "if these are samples, I'm going to Northumberland myself."

Then Mrs. Leicester bore him and Fordyce away to be presented, and Harwood hurried to his car.

The front door of The Oaks was open, and Mrs. Gascoyne was standing in the hall, smoothing on her gloves, as the motor drew up.

"I'm coming!" she called, and flinging on her long cloak, she caught up her gown and was out before Harwood could cross the piazza. "This is very good of you!" giving him her hand—"you shouldn't have left your guests."

"Theoretically and old style, I shouldn't," he replied, nodding to the driver, as Brown snapped the tonneau door; "actually and modern fashion, no house-party cares what becomes of the host, so long as he provides them with food and drink and amusement. And really, I rather prefer it so; it's easier all around. And then, you see, in this instance, it gives me the privilege to go over to you whenever I wish, without dragging any of them along."

"That will be very nice," she answered. "I shan't object, I'm sure—if no one else does."

The car slowed down and stopped.

"And when am I to see the vision you promised—of another and myself?" she asked, as they went up the stairway—"or isn't 'the other' here?"

"Yes," said he, "she is here—the vision was the picture of you both under the candles, in the drawing-room."

"Oh!" she laughed, relieved of the last anxiety; "what a disappointment! I was anticipating something really worth while."

She loosed her cloak, and Harwood handed it to William. The hall was deserted, the guests were in the drawing-room.

"There are those yonder," he said, "who won't be disappointed, even though they are not looking for visions."

His eyes were so frankly approving that, woman-like, she spurred him on.

"You like green?" she asked, naïvely.

"I like *that* green—and the red above it, too!" he laughed.

"You're horrid!" she exclaimed, "perfectly horrid!"

The drawing-room occupied the entire north side of the house, and was, in every material particular, an exact reproduction of the one at Fairlawn Hall. The walls and ceiling were panelled in walnut,—painted an ivory white, how-

ever, to correspond with the original — the side panels broken at intervals by fluted columns with carved capitals, and hung alternately with paintings and rich, soft-toned red damask, which showed no streak of age. The high mahogany doors—the handles of solid silver, stamped with the Harwood device—swung between twin columns, supporting the ornate entablature with the broken raking-arch. A deep double cornice bound the walls to the ceiling, and shot its carvings, in profuse decoration, to the centre, where hung the great chandelier, with its sweeping branches of brass and pendent crystals, and its sixty candles within their tall glass shades. No desecrating hand of plumber nor electrician had ever touched it; and to-night every candle burned unflickeringly, filling the room with the soft and mellow light.

And standing directly beneath it, in gay converse with Fordyce, Evelyn Leicester heard Harwood's voice, and turned, knowing whom he brought.——

"Mrs. Leicester—Mrs. Gascoyne!" was the introduction.

And so Harwood had his vision.

And not he alone, either. Burgoyne caught Wilberforce by the arm and swung him around.

"Lord! man!" he exclaimed, "who is *that?*"

"Confound you!" said Wilberforce, recovering his eye-glasses on the fly, and shoving them back into place. "Who is what?—Oh! I say!" and was gone.

"MRS. LEICESTER—MRS. GASCOYNE!"

"Now isn't that like Tony!" Rosalind Spottswood laughed, "always after the next pretty face. Better toddle along, Leigh; Nancy and I will excuse you—we've got to have you at dinner, anyway."

"Why not go with him?" said Miss Willoby. "It's the custom, in the country, to meet every one—and besides, I want a closer look at that hair."

"It is astonishing," Burgoyne remarked, "how a woman never credits another woman's hair, or complexion, or figure. Isn't there anything about you that is natural?"

"Marry one of them and find out!" said Jane Heyward, coming up behind, with Talbot Vanbrugh. "Show your nerve, like Carter Heyward did."

"One awful example suffices, thank you!" Burgoyne retorted, as they joined the circle under the chandelier.

Almost immediately, the butler appeared at the doorway.

Harwood gave his arm to Mrs. Gascoyne. The others trailed indiscriminately along behind, except that Judge Casson, with all the dignity of the old régime, brought up the rear with Mrs. St. George.

As Harwood crossed the hall, Henry Landor came springing down the stairs.

"A thousand excuses, old man!" he exclaimed, "I must have dropped asleep; I hope I've"—his eyes fell upon Mildred Gascoyne, and a look of

amazed incredulity flashed through them; then he swept it away—" not delayed you," he ended.

Harwood heard the sharp intake of his companion's breath and, for an instant, her hand pressed his arm. But when he glanced down, save that her face was very pale, she seemed quite unconcerned, and she acknowledged the quick presentation, with a formally impersonal smile—though, there, at the name of Gascoyne, he saw again the shadow of puzzled incredulity flit through Landor's eyes.

" I didn't see Mr. Landor with you this morning," she remarked, as they went on toward the dining-room.

" No, we dropped him at the Capital as we went through. He came in this afternoon. Good-looking chap, isn't he? "

" Yes," she agreed—" he startled me."

" Are handsome men then so very rare? "

She smiled and shook her head.

" I took him for someone I knew long ago—and despised," she explained.

" Which may account for your manner," thought Harwood, " but not for Landor's."

However, it was not for him to pry into; not even though Landor were the very one she had in mind that afternoon, in the garden of The Oaks, when he first mentioned this dinner—at least not so long as Landor did not make himself openly objectionable to her.

"What would you think if I were to ask you a rather personal question?" she said, as, having seated her, he took his own chair the faintest interval after the other men.

"That it isn't personal, because *you* ask it."

"Which might be interpreted as a polite notice not to ask it," she rejoined—"but I'm going to anyway:—why did you deliberately put me beside Mrs. Leicester, in the middle of the drawing-room, to be stared at by every one and torn to tatters by the women?"

"In plain words, why did I embarrass you—why was I rude?"

"No, not that. It wasn't rude; and it didn't embarrass me—a woman early learns indifference to stares and criticism. You spoke of visions—what was the motive?"

"Simply sentimental—you and Mrs. Leicester are the very exponents of your types—to speak quite frankly, you are the two most beautiful women I ever saw, or ever expect to see. Hence, in the marvellous fortune of having you in the same house, do you blame me for wanting to put you side by side, under conditions which could never exist but once—a first meeting—suddenly, unexpectedly, and under the soft candle-light, of that wonderful chandelier. Surely, milady, you must admit the æsthetic justification!"

An incredulous smile had come, and she made no effort to hide it.

"And to whom, O Paris, Son of Priam! does the apple go?" she scoffed.

"I'm waiting for the bribe."

She made the faintest motion indicating the other women.

"Choose!" she said; "Argive Helen, herself, could not surpass them."

He bent a bit nearer, and held her eyes with his own.

"Perhaps!" he said. "Yet I should prefer Helen."

"Because she was married?"

"No; because her hair was red."

She made a gesture of annoyance.

"Why will you persist?" she asked.

"Because I'm bewitched by it."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I had the idea that you preferred another color."

"What color?"

She let her glance turn slowly toward Evelyn Leicester, but made no answer.

"For which, I suppose, our friend, the Judge, is responsible!" he laughed.

She smiled noncommittingly.

"And it's so much prettier than—red," she said.

"Of course it is, Mrs. Gascoyne!" Wilberforce cut in, "of course it is! I've not an idea what it is, but it is because you say it is. That sentence is rather long on 'it is,' isn't it?"

Mrs. Gascoyne looked at him with lifted brows.

"Mr. Wilberforce is quite harmless," Harwood explained; "he simply labors under the hallucination that he is a wit."

"Just as Mr. Harwood labors under the hallucination that he is well-bred and has good manners. Every one has his freak side, you know. What's yours, Mrs. Gascoyne?"

"Aversion to familiarity on the part of strangers."

"Bravo!" cried Harwood; "come again, Tony, come again!"

"Quite unnecessary, my friend! the lady and I understand each other perfectly, now—she is going to—what is it you are going to do with me tomorrow morning, Mrs. Gascoyne?"

"What is it you would like to do?" said Mildred, laughing, quite won by his good-natured face and bland impudence.

"Lose yourself, my sweet host!" said Wilberforce; "I'm talking to Mrs. Gascoyne now; you're out of this wagon—there's an empty one on your near side—climb in, climb in!"

By which inelegancy, Wilberforce meant that Rosalind Spottswood, who was upon Harwood's left, was momentarily alone; and Colleton, understanding, laughed and "climbed in."

Presently, Burgoyne, Rosalind's partner, resumed duty, and Harwood gradually dropped out of the chatter, and watched the lower end of the table with absent-minded eyes. Old Judge Casson was

relating a story to Mrs. St. George, who seemed to be highly amused and entertained. Evelyn Leicester was flirting shamefully with Fordyce, and, catching her eye, he shook his head in mock reproof; to be answered by a lift of chin, and an impudent flash of black eyes through half-closed lids. He wondered vaguely if she were binding the blond Egertonian to her chariot wheels for her own delectation, or as a move in the " try " at himself which she had threatened. If the latter, it would be powder wasted; he really could not work up even a suggestion of jealousy—on the contrary, it aroused nothing more than a keen curiosity as to the result to herself, if she warmed to life that phlegmatic young man's frozen affections.

Then his glance came slowly around to Mildred Gascoyne; and he broke in on Wilberforce, and took her away, with a suddenness almost curt, and a masterfulness almost proprietary. And for the rest of the dinner he kept her to himself.

VII

PLAYING THE PART

Evelyn Leicester had not been so occupied with Fordyce's subjection as to overlook Harwood's attitude toward Mrs. Gascoyne; and it confirmed her apprehension. There was danger; and if she were not to lose him, he must be cut away from the Lady of the Laugh. It was a fetching laugh, she must admit; even then it came rippling softly down the table, and she fancied that all the men had bent their heads to catch it as it passed. She knew very well that, with men, a melodious laugh is second only to a pretty face—and usually, after the first meeting, much the more gripping of the two. It was the laugh on the Grand Canal that had lingered in Harwood's memory—and now it had come back to him with this red-haired and mysterious beauty of The Oaks! On the whole, she had a rather difficult campaign before her, if the other were disposed to contest.

When Mrs. St. George gave the signal, Evelyn Leicester paused long enough for the word and smile that would insure Fordyce for her later, then she turned slowly toward the door, timing carefully to be there with Mrs. Gascoyne.

"Where shall we go?" she asked, with an inti-

mate little smile, "there will be at least half an hour to kill."

"Then let us go to the billiard-room," said Mildred.

She wanted to get as far away as possible from the man who had watched her with keen eyes, as she passed close by him, and was still watching, she knew—the man for whom intuitive apprehension had warned her to look, when Harwood's party arrived; but, who, by some ill chance for her, had not come with it. She had felt his glance repeatedly during dinner, always quick and fleeting, shifting instantly she met it, and it had been sufficiently disconcerting then; but to walk directly toward him and by, along the standing, black-clad line was distinct nerve-agony. Yet there was the faint relief, that the very persistence of his looking and its manner indicated that he was not sure of his recognition —was not convinced that she *was* she. He was puzzled and doubtful; and she knew exactly why—had known from the instant they met in the hall. It was that which gave her the cue how to act. Whether she could play it successfully, hereafter, was another matter; enough, now, that it was serving her this night.

At first, she had thought only of flight—from Fairlawn, the instant the dinner was over; from the town, by the early morning train. Then, as she saw that his indecision still continued, the panic subsided, and she had played her part easily, and even

with finesse—but could she play it when the real test came; when the man stood before her and accused, if not by actual words, at least by tone and manner? And, after all, was it worth while to take the chance, to make the effort! Expediency bade her fly, hate and pride cried for her to stay;—and even now, as she winced and suffered under Landor's steady stare, hate and pride were deciding for her, though, as yet, she did not know.

The billiard-room was on the ground-floor, under the drawing-room, and as Mrs. Leicester and Mrs. Gascoyne crossed the hall, to the stairway in the corner opposite, Hilda Gordon joined them.

"I know where you're going, and why!" she laughed; "and I'm with you. When you were about it, Evelyn, why didn't you provide a chaperon who is cigarette-proof?"

"Or why did I provide a chaperon at all?" Mrs. Leicester supplemented.

"To be sure! why didn't you consider yourself the chaperon?"

"Perhaps I should," said Evelyn, "if you had not insisted upon Henry Landor."

"Poor Henry!" Miss Gordon exclaimed, drawing herself up on the rail of the table, and crossing her pretty legs regardless of elevation. "Is he then so very dangerous!" She drew out a thin, gold case, and proffered it to Mrs. Gascoyne. "Try one of mine; they are much better than Mrs. Leicester's."

Mildred shook her head.

"If you don't mind, I'll not smoke," she said.

"Meaning that you don't approve?"

"Meaning just what I said," Mildred smiled. "I never trouble myself enough about others' doings, either to approve or disapprove."

"It's a pity the world isn't blessed with a lot more like you!" Miss Gordon commented. "What have *you* got against Henry, Evelyn!"

"Judging from your present temper, having just left him," Evelyn replied, "it might be more to the point for you yourself to begin the enumeration."

Hilda Gordon laughed good naturedly.

"You score!" she said—"though you're mistaken. If I have any quarrel, it is with Mrs. Gascoyne—she practically monopolized Mr. Landor during dinner."

Mildred was sitting on the arm of a chair, beside a table, idly turning the pages of a magazine.

"I was not aware of it," she said slowly, and without looking up.

"You didn't seem to be, I admit—our host was quite too entertaining for you to notice another man's stares, even though they continued through the entire meal. Tell me, Mrs. Gascoyne, did you ever meet Henry Landor before to-night?"

"Couldn't Mr. Landor remember?" asked Mildred, dryly.

Miss Gordon held up a very pretty hand, and flashed the rings a moment.

"No!" she laughed; "he said he didn't know; that is why I asked you."

Mildred drove a smile to her face, and strove to keep the annoyance from her voice.

"And why should my memory for him be better than his for me?" she asked.

"I give it up—riddles are not in my line. I only thought it might be, because you ignored him with such persistent deliberation."

"How foolishly inconsistent you are, Hilda!" Mrs. Leicester broke in. "You assume that Mr. Landor knows Mrs. Gascoyne because he looked at her, and that Mrs. Gascoyne knows Mr. Landor because she *didn't* look at him. Besides, it's none of our affair anyway; I don't imagine you have any serious intentions in that direction."

Miss Gordon shrugged her shoulders.

"Intentions?—who knows! Surely, he is handsome enough! Don't you think so, Mrs. Gascoyne?"

"If she didn't look at him, how can she know?" Evelyn persisted. "As far as I can see, neither Mrs. Gascoyne nor I is interested in Mr. Landor, so, for heaven's sake, let us discover another topic!"

"Bearing in mind, however, my dear Evelyn, that it is you who made him the topic."

"Very good—then I'm the one to exclude him! . . . Don't mind us, Mrs. Gascoyne, we are sort of a family, and speak rather frankly to one another."

"And I thoughtlessly made the mistake of treat-

ing Mrs. Gascoyne as one of the family," said Miss Gordon. "I cry her pardon!" She tossed away her cigarette, and dropped languidly from the table to the floor. "I suppose it is bridge, to-night, as usual!" and with a quick smile and a careless nod she left them.

For a little while, there was silence. Evelyn Leicester watched the smoke spiral upward from the end of her cigarette. Mildred Gascoyne looked thoughtfully at nothing, and wondered whether Miss Gordon was simply ingenuous, or had been inspired by Landor to quiz her about him. Likely, he had been content only to arouse her curiosity, confident that the feminine in her would do the rest, and that he should quickly hear the result. At any event, it was very evident it would be well to avoid Miss Gordon.

Presently Mrs. Leicester took out a fresh cigarette.

"Better reconsider," she said, proffering the case.

Mildred laughed, and accepted.

"I don't mind *now*," she replied.

Evelyn smiled comprehendingly, and sipped the cherry cordial, that William had just brought. Then she held the glass toward the light.

"Beautiful!" she said; "beautiful, and ravishingly delicious!"

"It is a specialty of Fairlawn—that, and the Burgundy—it has been so for generations, I am told."

"It must be profoundly satisfying to be the master of a house with generations."

"And to be its mistress, too!" Mildred added. "Such a house! and such a garden!"

She was thinking of Mrs. Leicester as this mistress. She liked Harwood, and so she was prepared to like her, who, as Judge Casson had led her to believe, was to be Harwood's wife.

But Evelyn, having no suspicion of this notion on the part of Mrs. Gascoyne, saw only a confirmation of the apprehension that she aimed to be its mistress.

"You know them well, I suppose?" She rather asserted than questioned—she wished to make quite sure.

Mildred shook her head. "No, not well—not so well as I should like; you see, I've lived beside them just long enough to feel their real fascination. Why, even my little dog loves this wonderful garden—Betty Colleton's garden, as it is called, for the beautiful first mistress who planned it; she whose portrait hangs in the drawing-room."

Not so well as she should like! Evidently not! and yet, now, Evelyn's assurance was not quite so sure. Why this artless candor with a stranger?—who must be viewed either as a rival or as Harwood's close friend—in whichever aspect, a most undesirable confidante. Mrs. Gascoyne was no silly, sentimental girl to make such mawkish blunders. And yet there was the evidence of her own eyes at dinner;

and Harwood's unmistakable interest in his neighbor, when he returned to Northumberland. Methods and motives aside, the cardinal facts remained, that Harwood was attracted by the woman, and that the woman seemed very willing to become mistress of Fairlawn Hall. The natural resultant of such a combination was fairly obvious—particularly, when the woman happened to be a red-haired beauty.

"I did not go into the garden, to-day," said Evelyn. "I saw it only from the rear piazza—wouldn't you like to come over in the morning and show it to me—the little nooks and the vistas, that only an intimate knows?"

Come here, in the morning, informally; where Henry Landor was sure to be!—and give him the chance she knew he was waiting for! Mildred had no such idea.

"I am sorry!" she said, "I have an engagement; the Hunt Club meets."

"Oh, to be sure! We were told of it at luncheon."

"And you all are coming?"

"No, not all—a few don't ride to hounds."

"You do?" said Mildred.

"Yes—though I'm not fond of too stiff going; how is it here?"

"It depends on the draw—to-morrow's is the Cedars; it is easy—Buzzard Hill is the nasty one. It will be on Friday;—and the last of the season."

"Then to-morrow for me!—if I live through it, I can consider as to the Buzzard. The very name suggests death."

"It gets about one a season. Betty Singleton, the sister of Fairlawn's recent master, was killed there, last year."

Evelyn Leicester shuddered faintly; she did not have the nerves of the hunt—the fatalism that is essential for a proper enjoyment of the sport.

"Fence?" she asked.

Mrs. Gascoyne nodded. "Under the horse, and dead when they got her out."

Again Evelyn shuddered. "Horrible! I'm not so sure now even of to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Mildred exclaimed. "Somehow, I thought you were bred to it, as I have been. Then, one never associates danger with one's self—it's only for the others—and very rarely for them. It's pretty much like automobiling."

"Only more so," said Evelyn; "in hunting there isn't any hiring an expert to handle the reins while you sit calmly in the saddle. Besides, with us, in Northumberland, riding to hounds is only a fad of recent fashion—we are so new to it the gloss isn't off the men's tops. We dash madly after the elusive anise, and try to persuade ourselves that we are enjoying it, all the while wishing we were back at the Club House, and safe for another week."

Mildred laughed. "And you never have ridden in a real hunt?"

"No."

"Then you have something to look forward to—something compared to which the chase of an anise bag is as mild as tiddle-de-winks."

"I don't know just whether that frightens or allures," said Evelyn. "A little of both, perhaps—with a preponderance of fright when I think of a strange horse."

"Don't think of it. Tell Mr. Harwood you want Hector; then give the sorrel his head and don't fuss him, he will do the rest."

The sudden rush of voices, from the hall, indicated that the men had come out. Mrs. Leicester finished her liqueur and arose; Mrs. Gascoyne was already up.

"I suppose we must immolate ourselves on the bridge table," said Evelyn; "for my part, I should much prefer staying here—without the men."

"And so should I!" Mildred answered quickly, and with ardor. Her thought was of Landor—to be saved his hateful, searching eyes.

But Mrs. Leicester, seeing only from her point of view, which, of course, did not include Landor, was puzzled more than ever.

At the top of the stairs, they met Harwood and the Judge about to descend.

"We were coming for you," said Colleton. "Mrs. Leicester, Judge Casson—for Mrs. Gascoyne and himself—has challenged us to a bout at bridge."

"Oh, horrors, Judge Casson!" Mildred exclaimed; "you know I don't play good bridge."

"I know you play well enough, madam, for me to be honored in being your partner."

"You can't refuse, now!" Harwood laughed.

"I suppose not," laying her fan lightly across the old man's arm; "but I'm of the notion that it is going to be a case of very expensive blarneying—better repent while there is time, my friend!"

"I'm not of the sect that accepts repentance *in extremis*—on the contrary, sir," addressing Harwood, "I'm ready to double the stakes!"

"Then I won't play!" declared Mildred. "I'll save you from your own impulsive self, at least to that extent."

Fordyce had been searching for Mrs. Leicester, now he sighted her, and bore down for capture.

"And where do I come in?" he asked, laying-to beside her.

"You don't come in, my boy!" the Judge laughed. "Your old uncle is at this table."

"Mr. Fordyce shall have my hand," said Harwood, very willing to be rescued from bridge; and very ready to further Evelyn's campaign—the smile with which she had greeted Fordyce proved that it still was on.

"Impossible, sir!" Fordyce responded. "I shall be more than content to look on, if I may."

Harwood insisted; Fordyce was firm; Judge Casson chatted with the women.

"At least," said Colleton finally, as they paused at the table, "you and I will cut in for the first rubber, and then alternate."

Again Fordyce refused.

"You don't understand, Harwood!" the Judge broke in. "Fordyce is not at liberty to play with me:—a century or so ago, a Casson killed a Casson over the cards. Since that time, it is the family obligation that two of us must never sit in the same game."

"A wise rule, even on general principles," Harwood answered, sitting down and spreading the cards for the cut; "it might be well if it obtained in many families—I know not a few where it would be very proper."

"And so do all of us, I fancy," Evelyn added—"it is almost axiomatic among women, at least, that relatives at a card table spells trouble."

They were in a corner of the library; Fordyce drew a chair close beside Mrs. Leicester, and received her smiling permission to over-look her hand. Mrs. Gascoyne was facing the room, with Harwood on her right.

On a big table in the hall, a crowd was playing faro; Mrs. St. George having, it seems, expressed a wish at dinner to learn something about the game. As chaperon she had stipulated a dime limit; which, she said, even a clergyman could not disapprove. Burgoyne was dealing, using a pasteboard box shaped up for the occasion, and the women were

playing with all the enthusiasm of the novice, and all the natural gambler-spirit of their sex.

As she crossed the hall, Mildred had searched this crowd for Landor, but he was not there; was, indeed, the only one missing. Now, from where she sat, she still could see that he had not joined them.

She and the Judge had won the first rubber, and the deal was hers. She declared a without, on a hundred aces and not a picture; the dummy laid down a negative hand, and it required all her attention to save the odd.

"Bravo!" the Judge exclaimed; "that was a beautiful example of the value of thirteeners, and how to make them. My compliments, partner!—don't forget to score the century of honors, Harwood!"

"They are scored!"

"Score them again!"

It was a pleasantry he had used so many years that it had become mechanical. He didn't know he said it. To Evelyn and Harwood, however, it was new, and drew its laugh. And for the moment the Judge did not understand.

But Mrs. Gascoyne had heard neither his compliment nor his automatic humor. When she looked up, at the end of the hand, it was to see Henry Landor standing in the doorway, his eyes upon her; nor did he drop them, but, for a space, stared at her with steady deliberation. And she, assuming

an air of languid curiosity, looked calmly back at him—until, with a placid smile of conventional courtesy, he affected to realize what he was doing, and with an apologetic bow, turned away.

And, somehow, he seemed to take Mrs. Gascoyne's nerve with him, for she bungled the next rubber so atrociously that Judge Casson's wonder almost burst into speech—and finally, when the baldest sort of a revoke was called on her, his wonder turned to concern lest she were ill; and he would have spoken had she not spoken first. The revoke had been the climacteric sedative.

"I'm not crazy, partner, really I'm not!" she laughed; "and if you will trust me for another rubber, I will prove it."

And even as the Judge assured her of his enduring trust, now and forever and in all things, she saw Henry Landor leave the circle in the hall and saunter carelessly across to the library. He paused a moment in the doorway, then came directly to their table, and, with a word to Harwood for permission, took stand behind him, putting her in line of the fall of the cards, and where she could not see him except by deliberately turning to the side and looking up.

Yet now it bothered her not at all. She was the dealer, and with a weak passed-heart, she played the hand so bewilderingly in finesse that she scored at least three tricks beyond the real value of her cards. And what though her cheeks were a bit

flushed and her eyes snappingly bright, if it did not affect the calm stroke of her heart, nor the cool working of her brain!

"May I be permitted to remark, Mrs. Gascoyne," said Landor, as the last card fell, "you played that with splendid force."

She called the score, and pushed the cards into the middle of the table—very much rather would she have hurled them into Landor's face. Yet she appreciated that to carry off her part, she must disguise her real feelings; so she flashed him a smile and a word of thanks; at the same time, however, with no intention to let the opportunity slip.

"But I did not know you were watching *the play*," she ended.

And though the significance in the accent was very faint, yet he understood. And, with it, his misgiving returned afresh. During dinner, he had become almost certain of his recognition, and the careful inspection from the doorway, had confirmed him. Yet, now, all this assurance was destroyed by a bridge hand, a smile and a rebuke; he was more puzzled and more doubtful than ever. Surely, if Mrs. Gascoyne were *she*—the she he took her to be—there would have been no such gracious smile and manner, nor a venture of reproof, nor such brilliancy of card-play with him at her very shoulder.

And then it could very well be that he was mistaken. He was identifying the woman of twenty-

eight by her resemblance to the girl of eighteen—for it was ten years since he had seen her—and there was little but the face to draw upon—it, and the indescribable air of individuality that clings to every one, and which those, once familiar with it, seem to recognize instinctively and always. Indeed, it was this, with an occasional trick of mannerism, which had held him to his opinion, for in two important particulars there was an utter dissimilarity. Mrs. Gascoyne's hair should be black instead of red, her voice-tones airy and light instead of soft and low. That the latter were natural, and not assumed, he was well convinced; and that the hair was her own and not dyed, he had Hilda Gordon's word, given after a most careful inspection in the billiard-room. In fact, he had lost a box of gloves in the finding out. Of course, the name Gascoyne did not fit any better than the hair, but that was of no consequence. Names were as easy to change as clothes. To-morrow it should be his business to learn something of this lady's local history, and then, if possible, have a quiet little chat with herself. It was in the latter that he had most faith for definite results.

He took a cigarette from the tray on the table, and, swinging a chair sideways and a little back of Harwood and Mildred, he sat on the arm and watched the game.

Mildred was dummy, and beyond a nod of permission to his whispered request she gave him no

regard. But when the last trick was gathered, she leaned back, and, with head half turned, addressed him in bantering conversation. Then as the new trump was declared, she faced around and led, and played the hand as quickly and cleverly as though it were some good friend, and not the man she despised and feared most on earth, who was looking over her shoulder, so near that the thin spiral from his cigarette curled upward past her cheek.

A moment later, her relief came. The faro game ended, and Landor was borne off by Mrs. St. George for bridge.

Mildred did not see him again until she was leaving—after she and Judge Casson had won by a small margin. She had paused for an instant at the drawing-room door, to nod farewell, and Landor, who was dummy, forthwith joined her.

"Good-night!" he said, bowing, suave and graceful; "I'm delighted you pulled out ahead. May I come over for a cup of tea, to-morrow afternoon?"

"Do you like afternoon tea?" she asked, thinking instantly of Harwood.

"Very much, indeed:—as a means to an end."

"Really, Mr. Landor," she laughed, "after *that*, it is positively ungrateful that I shall not be at home to-morrow afternoon—try it again, another day."

She was playing the part to the end, though the words almost choked her.

"You will be at the meet in the morning, won't you?" he asked, as she moved away.

"Yes!" she answered, over her shoulder. On the piazza, she looked up at Harwood. "Promise me, m'sieur, promise me, that you won't let him get beside me!"

It was her woman's cry for man's aid against man.

And Harwood, not understanding, and wishing not to understand until she herself should care to make it plain, pressed the gloved hand she had given him at the stairway, and smiled, the reassuring smile of the dependable and strong.

"Trust me, milady!" he replied—"for to-morrow—and as often as you wish."

"Good-night!" she said, softly, as he handed her into the car. "Good-night!—and thank you!"

"Good-night!" he answered, knowing that she meant for him not to come. He stepped back and closed the door. "Mrs. Gascoyne's residence, Hudson; drive on!"

VIII

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

THE Hunt Club had been organized something over three generations ago, and the membership was limited strictly to descendants of the founders.

Yet if it were conservative in this respect, it was liberal to the limit otherwise. Not only did it maintain the kennels,—rather famous, too, in their strain —provide for all damage, and look after the supply of foxes, but every one was welcome at the covert, without regard to mount, or dress, or position in society. No restrictions were imposed, save courtesy and honest sportmanship. These observed, and anyone was welcome to the brush; these violated, and the banishment was forthwith and forever. As a consequence, the entire country-side was on good terms with the Club; and the very individual who ordinarily is the most obstructive, the small farmer, was enthusiastic for the sport. He had seen his father ride to the meet before him, and he had ridden, too, as soon as he was big enough to jump a horse. And what though occasionally they did cut up a bit of his crop, or throw down a panel of fence, here and there! the former would be paid for liberally, upon notice; and surely, he himself could replace a few rails, as a small return for his enjoyment.

As a result, however, the field was anything but smart in appearance. There was not a pink coat, nor a top; not a groom, straining with a nervous, high-strung hunter dancing around and lashing out; not a hack—the horse one rode to covert had to go the course, too.

Instead, women in habits of various fashions, and various headgear—some with no headgear at all, save bows of ribbon at neck and crown; men in cords and puttees—principally the younger members, with a few of the elders—but the majority, club-men, as well as the *hoi polloi*, wore canvas leggings, with ordinary trousers and sack-coats that did not always match.

As for the mounts, they were of every sort and kind, from the silky-haired patrician of the Blue-grass, to the common-bred utility of the road; but they all could jump, and show a bit of speed, though, of course, in varying degrees; yet the instances were by no means few, in the records of the Egerton Hunt, of the little horse of a countryman being first at the death.

And it was into such a gathering, that the Fairlawn party rode, in the hazy dampness of the early morning, under escort of Judge Casson and Fordyce, who had met them at the cross-roads beyond the town. Only five had come with Harwood, Evelyn Leicester, Hilda Gordon, Rosalind Spottswood, Wilberforce and Landor; the others either did not ride or did not care to; which was rather

fortunate, as good mounts for all of them would have been somewhat difficult to provide.

Harwood had looked, at once, for Mrs. Gascoyne, and as he could not see her among those in the roadway and the field, he assumed she had not arrived. He had intended to ask her to join them, but, after last night, he knew she would not wish it. Rawdon, the M. F. H., had come over to Judge Casson, the President of the Club, and was being presented; he nodded familiarly to Harwood, whom he had met the previous week, then swung up and jogged across the meadow to the cedar thicket he was about to draw.

"Come on!" said the Judge, reining up beside Mrs. Leicester, "they are going to throw off."

As Harwood drew back, intending to follow last, he saw Mrs. Gascoyne a little way down the road, and he went back slowly to meet her.

"A bit late!" he said.

"Do you think so?" she smiled, acknowledging his salute with a lift of her crop. "It seems to me I've timed it exactly right; I miss the tiresome gathering, and I—get you."

"You get me, that's certain!" he said; "but, alas, for me! you will get the others too."

"Thank you, m'sieur! now we are even on compliments."

"Mine was not a compliment; it was a simple statement of fact," running his eyes slowly over horse and rider—the one, blood-bay; the other in

dark green, a cocked-hat bound in gold above the glorious hair.

"That is because you like green—and red!" she mocked.

"Yes—and something more, maybe!"

She touched her horse with the spur.

"And it's rude to stare, m'sieur, even on the hunting field!" came over her shoulder, as the bay sprang ahead. Nor did she let Harwood get quite up to her until they had passed the fence, and were well down toward the cedars.

These cedars—from within which, came the voice of the Huntsman and the cries of the whippers-in—bordered, for half a mile, the far side of the small stream that bisected the meadow parallel with the road. Beyond the thicket, whose width was less than a third its length, lay a rocky flat that lifted presently in sharp acclivity to the narrow comb of the timber-topped ridge which bound the horizon to the westward.

"Don't you wish to join your party?" she asked, drawing down suddenly to a halt.

"No!" he answered; "the Judge and Mr. Fordyce can pilot them—I should only add to their trouble.—Do you wish to join them?"

She shook her head; at the same time waving a greeting which was really meant for Mrs. Leicester in particular, though it did duty for them all.

"Or maybe you would prefer that *I* join them?" he remarked.

"Quit fishing!" she laughed. "Some one must pilot you, so why not I?"

As they trotted quickly down to the far right-flank, the whole field watched them curiously, yet it did not seem to touch her in the least. Nor did it. She saw it all—yet how could it be otherwise, with the new Master of Fairlawn's first appearance at the Hunt! For in all honesty, she did not take a single glance to herself—though, woman-like, she was quite sensible of having borne off the hero of the moment. She acknowledged the frequent salutations, with a smile and a nod, or simply with a lift of her crop, as the degree of acquaintance warranted; and with a word here and there in passing, but with the faint air of aloofness which, while wanting nothing in courtesy nor cordiality, did not make for intimacy.

Suddenly, from the thicket, came the long note of a hound. Instantly, the field was in commotion.

"It's old Badger!" said Mrs. Gascoyne. "He never lies—hear!"

A chorus of yelps went up, and the Huntsman's horn sang the "Tally ho! Away!"

"They're off!" she exclaimed, gathering her reins, while the horses pranced restlessly, with heads high and nostrils wide. For a moment, the field hung expectantly until the dogs had laid the course—then, from deep in the wood, the horn called, and the hunt swept across the stream, and into the cedars.

"It's a bit tight, yonder!" she called to Harwood, as they flew the water, side by side; "better lie flat and go slow."

But neither was necessary; only a little way in, was a narrow cattle-path that led in their direction, and down it they galloped, single file. As they came out into the clearing, the hounds were almost up the acclivity; the next moment, they had passed the summit and disappeared, leaving behind their tuneful music, and a crowd of racing horses, on the flat below, extending in a long irregular line, with crescent ends; one, Judge Casson and the Fairlawn party, the other, Mrs. Gascoyne and Harwood.

As they struck the hill, she looked along the field and smiled.

"Here," she said, "is where the thinning out begins!"

When they gained the ridge the pack was lost, but far off to the left the cry was running.

"The Judge's luck!" she laughed, as they plunged down the hill-side; "the scent leads his way instead of ours. I'm a poor pilot."

"Nonsense!" said Harwood. "I'm only riding to be with you."

She lifted the bay over a fallen tree-trunk, and gave Colleton a tantalizing smile.

"I don't believe you!" she answered—"not with that chorus in your ears. . . . Listen! they have turned . . . . they are coming our way now! Come on! m'sieur, come on! we still may lead."

And Harwood, never very keen at the sport, because of never having followed it, except in the wooden, made-to-order, carefully-prepared, anise way, suddenly felt the tingle of the real infection, and the sporting blood of his ancestors claimed its own.

"I'm coming!" he replied. "Lead on!"

And she, used to all the phases of the hunting spirit, saw the change, and understood; and she waved her crop like a sword, and charged out onto the level.

Five hundred yards to the fore and half as many to the left, was the pack, running on a line that would lead directly across their front.

"Hurrah!" she cried; "we shall be right among them."

As she spoke, the dogs swung abruptly to the left and straight away.

"Well!" she said, looking over the field, "at least we are now on even terms with our friends yonder—though they have the better going; it's a trifle rough ahead."

"Yes," Harwood agreed a little later, after a succession of rather strenuous ins-and-outs among fallen timber and slippery, moss-grown rocks, "I'm quite sure it was *a trifle* rough!—if Nero hadn't known his business thoroughly, there would have been work for the surgeon."

"You're very modest!" she laughed; "though Nero *is* a dear."

"Your bay is better—he's the easiest jumper I ever saw."

She leaned down, and patted the shiny neck.

"I love Rajah!" she said—and the small ears came back in answer. "I could take off the rein, and he would carry me through—wouldn't you, boy?"

They were on the flat now, the hounds running free, a quarter of a mile ahead, the entire hunt strung out behind them. Presently, the trail veered sharply toward a line of willows on the right front.

"Water?" Harwood asked.

"Swamp!" said she, "and a soft one!" . . . . She gave an exclamation of disgust. "They're into it!—now for a check."

She glanced quickly around—yes, Landor was coming; they were sure to meet at the willows, unless the dogs picked up at once; and that, she knew from past experience, was most unlikely. She pulled down to a trot; she would let him get there ahead of her; as the last comer, she could avoid him at least for the moment.

From deep in the swamp, rose the cry of the Huntsman and of the whippers-in, who had dismounted and gone in on foot, and the answering whines and barks of the dogs.

"Why not ride around to the other side?" Harwood suggested; he had seen the look toward Landor, and thought to aid her.

"The fox won't go through," she answered:

" none of them seems to fancy the deep water over there. If they are driven out, they always break cover on this side."

Then she looked hard at Harwood, and turned directly across to Mrs. Leicester and Fordyce, who had halted a little apart from the others.

Whatever doubt Evelyn Leicester had entertained last evening, as to Mrs. Gascoyne's intentions, was pretty thoroughly removed now. Never, she told herself, had she seen a more deliberate and wilful carrying off; nor—and this was the rub—a more willing victim. In truth, she could scarcely credit it. For years, she had been accustomed to have Colleton Harwood at her call; never a thought of rivalry nor of desertion; the always-dependable, the never-failing; her especial and particular man-property. Now, for him to turn from her, and before her face prefer another woman, was a shock from which she had not yet recovered.

But the very shock of it had satisfied her of one important matter:—she was not in love with Harwood; it was simply a pride in possession—and a distinct unwillingness to give him over to another. He had defined it exactly in that message from India, when Jack Leicester died: he was her " elder brother "—always the hardest for the sister to lose.

And she was by no means sure that Mrs. Gascoyne was the one to have him; on that score, indeed, there was much room for conviction. She herself had made a mess of marriage, by her infatuation

and pell-mell, and she had wed one in her own circle, and not a mystery with a plethora of physical beauty and a paucity of known antecedents. Mrs. Gascoyne might be a lady, as Judge Casson said, and as was altogether likely if demeanor and appearance count at all—yet Mrs. Gascoyne, voluntarily, had put herself in a position which was unusual and justified comment, if not misgiving. Consequently, her own attitude was one of question—and whether she would be actively adverse, or simply keep hands off, was dependent upon further acquaintance.

All this, Evelyn had been considering during the run, which, thanks to Fordyce's guidance and Hector's ability, she had found very easy and altogether enjoyable. Now she met Mrs. Gascoyne with a most cordial smile.

"Hector has made me your everlasting debtor!" she said. "I let him alone and didn't fuss him, and he did everything else—he and Mr. Fordyce."

"Oh, don't mind me!" said Fordyce. "I'm not sensitive, like a horse."

"How very fortunate!" Evelyn laughed.

"It is part of the lawyer's education, isn't it?" Mildred asked, smiling at Judge Casson, who, bridle over arm, had just joined them.

"Yes," said Fordyce—speaking at his uncle, while affecting not to see him—"a very necessary part; else would few Judges escape violence."

"And few young whip-snappers, jail!" the old

man ejaculated. "At any rate, sir, you are in contempt; and the punishment is dispossession for the rest of the chase.—Will you help me to enforce it, madam?" bowing to Mrs. Leicester.

Her answer was lost in the wild chorus of the pack, and the ring of the horn. The scent was regained. There was a moment's confusion, a medley of cries, and when the hunt swept away, Judge Casson rode with Evelyn Leicester, while Fordyce, with calm indifference, had found place beside Hilda Gordon; but he took with him Mrs. Leicester's most recalling smile.

Meanwhile, Mildred Gascoyne was having a few troublesome minutes. Harwood had just dismounted to adjust a girth when the hounds gave tongue, and she, not being aware of it, gave Rajah his head and went on. In the press and clatter around her, she for a little time did not notice his absence; it never occurred to her that he was left behind—struggling with a frantic horse and an elusive stirrup.

Gradually the field trailed and spread—a killing pace with a pair of nasty ditches and an eight panel fence had done it. The dogs were running for blood; it was only a matter of minutes until they passed from scent to view. Hitherto, the very joy of the going had possessed her utterly; she had eyes and thoughts for only the pack and the course ahead. Now, as she swung into a long, level field, deep with daisies and lush grass and, as she knew

from previous experience, full of rock and holes, she held up a trifle and called back to Harwood (she supposed), who was close behind on the right; she had cut down every one else.

"Why don't you come up?" she asked. "I'll be glad to see you!"

"I've been trying to," said Landor, as he landed beside her, "but that bay of yours wouldn't have it."

He had noticed Colleton's dilemma, and forthwith had swung over in pursuit of Mrs. Gascoyne, lagging a bit behind, however, until no one else was near, and then rushing up suddenly to get the effect of a surprise.

How it was, that she did not cry out and betray herself, Mildred never knew; unless, as she told Harwood later, when her heart made its startled leap it stuck in her throat, and choked back the cry. Yet, whatever it was, choke or fright, it afforded the moment of respite, necessary to recover her self-control.

And Landor's very presence aided her.—She was of those who, timid and nervous in anticipation, are strong and unruffled when the test comes. She feared him, in the abstract—as an impending calamity; in the concrete, when under her voice and eye, and to be met, she feared him not at all.

She gathered her horse from the spurt, into which the other's coming up had sent him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr.—Landor!" she said,

giving him a quick smile; "I thought I was speaking to Mr. Harwood. Wasn't he behind me?"

"A long way behind!" Landor laughed. "The last I saw him, he was in hot chase of a saddle."

"A cropper!—where?"

He did not miss the quickness of it.

"No, not a cropper!" he answered—and explained.

She twisted far around, and glanced back along the track. (Whoever of women-kind thinks it easy to do, let her try it on a running horse.) Harwood was two fields away, and coming at top speed. He saw her looking, and flung up his arm in response.

As she faced to the front again, she glanced at Landor; he was watching her intently. Suddenly she appeared to lose the motion; she swayed uncertainly; seemed to be on the point of falling; then, with a little cry, she grasped the pommel and recovered her seat.

In the doing, she had pulled Rajah out of his stride and down almost into a canter—which was one object; and failed. Landor did not go on; he held back with her. The other, and by far the more important, was to retrieve, if possible, the blunder of having done that old saddle-trick with Landor looking on; when he had seen it years before, she did not bungle the recovery.

"Very cleverly done!" he said.

She understood his insinuation perfectly, but she put it aside.

"Which—the turn or the return?" she laughed.

"Both," he said; "but especially the return."

She met this with silence, eyes fixed on the pack ahead; and he, doubtful again, not sure that she had heard, and not daring to push the matter further then, was forced to quiet. And the disturbing thing about it all was, that this misgiving arose only with her direct presence. So long as he stood aloof and watched her, he had no doubt—the instant he came under her voice or actions, the doubt revived.

A decrepit worm-fence, a hundred yards away, marked the end of the daisies and lush grass; beyond, lay a plowed field. She had given Rajah his head, and they took the fence in the stride. Landor was over, two panels away, regardless of her prayer for a refusal or a smash. She listened for Harwood, not caring to look back a second time. If only he would come up!

Then clear and sweet, from horn and voice, rang the "view-hallo"; and straightway both Landor and Harwood were forgot. With the quick sight-instinct of the expert, her eyes found the little spot of reddish-brown, that was stealing swiftly across the rock-strewn flat toward the pines on the farther side. Rajah felt the quick prick of the needle, but there was no need of it to urge him on. The wild clamor of the pack was calling as loud to him as to his mistress. And not to them, only—the whole field was down, and riding for the kill.

Landor had made no effort to keep beside Mrs. Gascoyne. Instead, he fell back a few lengths, and watched the race between her and Evelyn Leicester. The latter had forgot everything but the ecstasy of the chase, the rush of the air, the sweeping swing of the horse, the lure of a quarry in sight, escaping, and to be caught. She gave Hector his head and let him have his way; for the moment, there was but one object for both—to come up with the slender, brown body flitting yonder among the rocks.

And beside her rode Judge Casson, smiling satisfiedly and very well content. To him, the two great joys of existence were a fox in view, and a pretty woman; here, he had them both.

Meanwhile, the big dog-fox was making a brave run for the timber; there lay his last chance for life. Behind him raced the pack. It was not the first time that he had heard it there, though, verily, never quite so near. A quick glance around—a great, scar-faced hound, that he had come to know for the leader of his foes, was almost upon him. He threw in his last ounce of reserve strength, bounded across a high, moss-grown rock, and, while the hounds were scrambling over or around it, he gained the shadow of the pines. But the respite was only momentarily; right behind him flashed the white streak of the pack—old Badger a length to the fore.

"They will kill in thirty seconds!" Judge Casson called to Mrs. Leicester.—"Ride for it! ride!"

And Mildred Gascoyne, a little way off on the same line, heard; and in courtesy she drew Rajah down the trifle that would insure the place to their guest and Fairlawn's coming mistress.

At the same instant, the note of the pack changed; it spoke frantic eagerness to destroy, but not destruction.

"Denned!" the Judge muttered.

But the Judge was mistaken. Treed, he should have said; Reynard had gone up, not down. With the dogs at his heels, and no hope to trick or outrun them, he had taken a flying leap into the low branches of a heavy cedar, and with all the strength and pliability of his sinuous body, he had worked his way well forward to the top. Old Badger's teeth snapped behind him, as he sprang; and now the whole pack were leaping, and yelping in baffled fury; while he, safe for the moment, watched them, with the glitter of eye and gleam of fang, that goes for the fox's laugh.

It was into such a kill that Evelyn led the field.

"The brush is yours, Mrs. Leicester!" said the M. F. H., who, dismounted and standing knee-deep among the hounds, had brought them to a semblance of quiet. "Will you have it, or shall we drive him down, and continue the run?"

"Is he my fox?" said Evelyn, surprised.

"All yours; no one else has a word to say."

She hesitated, just a bit perplexed.

"I don't wish to spoil sport," she said, with an

embarrassed little laugh, and a swift glance toward Harwood—who had pushed his way to Mrs. Gascoyne's right—" yet, don't you think that a fox who climbs a tree deserves his life? "

A ripple of applause ran over the crowd, while Judge Casson and Fordyce cried out in approval.

The Huntsman bowed, smilingly.

" The run is over! " he announced, and blew the recall.

IX

THE QUEER ELEMENT IN THE CASE

"HELLO, Harwood!" said Tony Wilberforce, as Colleton stopped in the billiard-room doorway; "aren't you sorry you asked us down?"

"No," said Harwood, "no; not yet!"

"But soon!" Wilberforce added. "Well maybe *I* am *now*."

"Sorry, old chap," Colleton laughed, "but the last express to frivolity and white-light has gone for the day; you will have to bear with us until to-morrow; the first train out is at seven—just leave a call with William, please, and excuse me from coming down."

Tony sent the red around the table and gathered on the end rail.

"Good! I'll excuse you from coming down for the next two weeks," he said. "You're a more considerate host than I thought; I've misjudged you; my most humble apologies, old friend. Now I shall have a chance at Diana."

"Oh, I see——"

"Of course you see! and so do the rest of us; but you are jolly careful that we take it out in seeing. Why don't you give some one else an opportunity to show a decently polite interest in your

neighbor, with a proper appreciation of the rare loveliness thereunto belonging."

"Positively, Tony, I can't imagine how you do it! Such richness of diction and profundity of thought! Go over and repeat it to the neighbor in question; don't waste it on me."

"Look at you!" Wilberforce continued; "went for her last evening, monopolized her at dinner, kept her at bridge, then took her away immediately; never gave any one a look in—all this in your own house! And this morning! grabbed her before she came up, carried her to the far flank, kept her there. Selfishness! selfishness! rotten selfishness!" Then he chuckled. "It was delightful to see you doing the stirrup dance, and Landor steal your place—Landor of all men!"

"Why didn't you steal it?"

"Because I wasn't near enough—which is the only reason, I can assure you." He laid down the cue, and swung one leg over the corner of the table. "Do you know, Colleton," he said, "I believe that infernal bounder is trying to work his lovely manners upon Mrs. Gascoyne, too. He was eyeing her last evening, and hanging on her trail this morning during the chase. Sometimes, I want to punch his damn head."

"Whose damn head, Tony?" asked Evelyn Leicester, through the open window, that looked out into the garden.

"Yours!" said Wilberforce—"for letting that

dazzling widow, yonder, get her hooks into Harwood."

"How am I to blame?" she laughed, stepping over the low sill into the room.

"For not marrying him."

The bluntness of it was startling—Harwood frowned; Evelyn flushed, faintly.

"I can't, Tony!" she said—"I've done everything but propose, and he has warned me not to do that, if I wish to avoid a refusal."

"I didn't imagine he was such a consummate ass. It would be quite safe to try it on me."

"You forget; it's only a week since you said that you couldn't afford me."

"I didn't forget," he replied, "and I knew you wouldn't, either.—I could be quite as handy around the house as our friend here; but, you see, I haven't the house, nor the requisite Russian-Imperial-Sables-straight-front-sheath-bocker-lingerie bank account."

"If you could turn that iridescent vocabulary into cash," Harwood exclaimed, "you would have more than enough to buy the earth."

"It's a rum habit, I know," said Wilberforce, going toward the door, "but you see it is the only extravagance I can afford."

"Why not economize?" Evelyn laughed.

He paused, and looked at her meditatively.

"I'll do it!" he replied, and went upstairs, leaving her suddenly troubled of heart.

It had come to her—from something in his look—that he really cared. And she liked him enough to be sorry.

"Have you been presented to the goddess of the garden?" Harwood asked. (He had not observed Wilberforce's look, nor, if he had, would he have seen anything unusual in it.) . . . . "No? then come out and meet her!"

"Might it be that her hair is Titian?" she asked.

"I don't know!" he laughed; "I've never seen her; but Cleopatra tells that it is black."

She flashed him a smile, and they passed out among the flowers.

"It is delicious!" she exclaimed, breathing in the mingled perfumes; "and utterly fascinating in its air of rest and dignified seclusion. I don't wonder you love it! . . . . I fancy Northumberland won't see very much of you hereafter."

He broke off a cluster of Cherokees and hung it across her shoulder.

"I don't know," he said; "I never was there, anyway, except in spring and early autumn."

"Nor is any one else who can get away—and now, with this home, there is nothing to draw you back to Northumberland, even then."

"Nothing but the tendency of a body to continue in its orbit."

"Pooh!" she retorted; "you are out of the old orbit, now—you're already tributary to another sun."

"What sun?" he asked.

"The sun of family tradition."

"Say rather the staticism of natural indolence."

"Nonsense, Colleton! you are not in the least indolent; it is all assumed. And why shouldn't you stay here? If Fairlawn were my home I'd be crazy about it. I wouldn't leave it, except perhaps in mid-winter, for any place I ever saw—and then I certainly would not go back to black snow and bituminous atmosphere."

"Shouldn't you even want to see your old friends?" he asked.

"I could have them down here."

"You always did prefer the country to the big town," he said; "and I'm about persuaded that you are right."

"Aside from that question, however, wouldn't you rather be the Master of Fairlawn, with all which it signifies in this locality, than simply Colleton Harwood of Northumberland, of the clan of the idle-rich?"

"I should be of the idle-rich, here, just the same."

"No—quite no! there, you are an inconsequent dawdler; here, you will be under obligation to uphold the customs of an honored name."

"And you think that will be laborious?" he smiled.

"I think it will be a great opportunity; with your wealth and experience you should be another Captain Beverly Harwood."

"What do you know of him?" he asked, surprised.

"Judge Casson says he was the real king of all this section."

"He had a Betty Colleton for queen."

"Then let it be your immediate business to find a Betty Colleton."

"There are few of them on earth, these days," he replied; "I know only one, and she wouldn't marry me!"

"Thank you, Colleton!" she said; making no pretence not to understand; "though how do you know I would not marry you?"

"Shall I ask you?" he demanded, smiling.

She shook her head. "No, you are quite right; we have been friends too long to fall in love now."

"Say, rather, that we know each other too well—love would never get to the altar if it were not blind; it is not until the first note of the Recessional that it is blessed with sight."

"Blessed?" she echoed, thinking instantly of Jack Leicester,—"damned, you mean!"

"Whichever way you wish it, Evelyn!" he replied. (On the subject of her former experience there was entire frankness between them.) "But with us is love really essential? Why not marry as friends?"

"Because, my dear boy, we are too young—friends don't marry until they are growing old and need each other's nursing."

They were standing beside the sun-dial; she folded her arms upon it and leaned across, regarding him with a smile almost tender.

"And now, Colleton," she said, "you have done your devoir,—you have met Wilberforce's nasty contretemps bravely and at once. I am grateful—and I've manifested it by refusing you." She put out her hand to him. "Only, I pray you, don't choose your Betty until you have proved her well."

He laughed and took her hand.

"You are thinking of Mrs. Gascoyne?" he said.

"Yes, I am thinking of Mrs. Gascoyne."

"You do not like her?"

"On the contrary, I am very much taken with her—but, in a wife, you want more than beauty and attractive ways."

"They are rather fetching qualities to start with, don't you think?—and fairly indicative of the rest."

"They are the primarily essential qualities, with most men," she replied; "but I can't admit that they are dependable indications of either disposition or morals."

"Possibly not dependable, certainly presumptive."

"Perhaps!—but for goodness sake, Colleton, verify the presumption before you marry her."

"I'll do better," Harwood chuckled; "I'll let you do the verifying."

She made a gesture of dissent.

"Be serious!" she said.

"How can I?—I have no thought of marrying Mrs. Gascoyne—nor any one else."

"No present thought, possibly—and you don't consider Mrs. Gascoyne; she may have a very present thought on the subject."

"She has!" he laughed, "but not quite in the way you mean, my dear—she is under the impression that you and I are betrothed.

"And why?"

"Because Judge Casson told her, I fancy—he seems to have assumed it from something that was said, or not said, the day I came here; he wanted me to remain over Saturday; I plead duty to a lady in Northumberland and promised to bring her down the following week. I saw his inference, but it rather amused me, and I let it go."

She nodded, silent for a little while. She was seeing some things in quite a different light:—remarks of Fordyce, suggestions of the Judge; particularly, Mrs. Gascoyne's conversation in the billiard-room the prior evening. It was Evelyn, herself, whom she had had in mind as mistress of Fairlawn.

"I am sorry!" said Harwood, taking her silence for disapproval and annoyance. "I will see to it at once that you are set right."

"Nonsense—why bother! if you can bear up, I'm sure I can; and it will help to keep the Judge and his handsome nephew in order."

Her real purpose was to withhold the truth from Mrs. Gascoyne. And Harwood understood.

"May I not tell my neighbor?" he asked.

She threw up her hands in despair.

"You don't deserve to be saved!" she exclaimed. "I've a great mind to let you go your own sweet way."

"Mrs. Gascoyne being the sweet way?" he laughed.

He turned away, toward the Hall.

"You are uncommonly silly to-day," she said; "and flippancy is impervious to argument and reason. But I've had my say, and the sister's conscience is clear, even if her mind isn't."

He put his arm around her shoulder, and took the hand she lifted to his.

"Trust me, my dear!" he said; "the last Master of Fairlawn managed to work along without a wife, and why shouldn't I—especially, when I have worked along so comfortably thus far."

She stopped, still holding his hand, and looked up at him with an enchanting smile.

"At least, Colleton," she said, "promise that while I'm *here*, you won't again desert me for—her, as you did this morning."

"I promise!" he answered. "I never imagined that you would mind; you had the Judge and Fordyce."

"No—they had me!—though, really, there are possibilities in Fordyce."

"I noticed you searching for them last night," he smiled.

"And I found them; buried deep down under cynicism and cultivated indifference—too deep, I fear, to dig out."

"Do you think of trying?"

"I don't know—perhaps—it suggests rather much labor for small amusement; besides, there is some one else who is vastly more promising of results."

"Tony?"

"No, not Tony! Why should you name him?"

"Don't you know, Evelyn?"

She nodded. "I didn't know until just a little while ago in the billiard-room. I'm so sorry."

"Don't be!" said Harwood. "It's not your fault; and it all goes in the game."

"No, it doesn't! it's not in the game for an old friend to become a lover—and, to me, it is very pathetic."

"I refuse to associate the pathetic with Tony!" he laughed; "whom do you mean—not the old Judge?"

She shook her head, smiling.

"Guess again," she said—"who is the one you would least imagine?"

He stared at her incredulously, a bit of a frown gathering.

"Not Landor!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Landor!—why not? There, don't look so

black, Colleton!—if you enjoy an affair with a mystery why shouldn't I?"

"Surely, Evelyn, you are not serious?"

"Again, why not? he is very handsome and his manners are beautiful!" she quoted.

Harwood shrugged his shoulders, and was silent. Mrs. Leicester slipped her hand through his arm and drew him to a nearby seat.

"Don't you think there should be a reciprocity in trustfulness?" she asked.

He smiled, then laughed softly, a quizzical gleam in his grey eyes.

"Just what is the purpose in this rounding-in of Landor?" he asked. "Is it to punish Hilda Gordon, or are you and she working together to drop him between you, so to speak?"

"Neither—though Hilda may not be pleased." She got up, glanced around and over the hedge behind them, then resumed her place. "It is this: and quit laughing, or I won't tell you."

"I'm mum!" said Harwood, solemnly.

She leaned close over—so close that her body pressed against him, and the perfume of her hair enveloped his face in violets. In a sudden impulse, he slipped his arm around her waist, and drew her even closer.

"Listen!" she said, giving him a bewitchingly daring smile, and making no move to draw away. "Henry Landor knows your neighbor, Mrs. Gascoyne—that surprises you!—and, what is more, she

knows him, though she feigns she doesn't; and she plays it so cleverly that he dares not trust his recognition."

"When did you pick up this queer idea?" he half scoffed, wishing to draw her out.

"Last evening. He watched her, either openly or slyly, all through dinner; while she never so much as gave him a glance—ignoring him so steadily that it could be only by intention. You didn't notice it, of course; you were too occupied with looking at her—though I don't blame you; she *was* good to look at."

"And is that all?" he asked, tightening his arm a trifle.

"No, it distinctly isn't!—if it were, it would be without import. I admit I thought nothing of it at the time. The other clues gave it significance.—Better take your arm away now, Colleton; if we are seen, no one will know it is only a brotherly embrace—indeed, I'd hardly take it as that sort, myself."

Harwood laughed, withdrew his arm, and turning sideways, one knee on the bench, faced her.

"Proceed!" he said; "what are the other clues?"

"Landor's actions; and hers, later, during the game. He watched her from the doorway and hung around the table, studying her, like one convinced yet still doubtful. And don't you remember her erratic play?—commonplace, at first; brilliant, so long as he was looking on; positively rotten the

moment he went away; and becoming suddenly brilliant again when he returned."

"How does that prove anything *for* your proposition?" he asked. "Isn't it dead against you?"

"I think not," she said. "Some minds—especially women's—grow abnormally clear and quick under strain or excitement, with instant reaction when it is over. This happened twice with Mrs. Gascoyne. Oh, she has known Landor,—of that, I'm sure—but for some reason she does not intend to know him *now*. And she plays her part beautifully. Landor is completely mystified—he is sure he knows her, and yet at the pinch he isn't sure. Indeed, she is clever, very clever!"

Harwood was astonished. She had hit the true conclusion—his own further knowledge confirmed it. Here was a power of observation, and inference that he had never suspected; and if she set herself to the problem there was very likely to be a solution which, necessarily, must be unpleasant for one of the persons in question, maybe for both. For Landor he cared not at all, but Mrs. Gascoyne had appealed to him for aid, and she should have it. Opposition was pretty sure to make Evelyn the more determined—she would know his interest was solely for Mrs. Gascoyne. For the moment there was only to show amused incredulity.

"Why, under the sun, should he be doubtful if he ever actually *knew* her?" he asked; "how could she deceive him? She talked with him during the

game, and in the hall afterward, and on the hunt this morning; she doesn't avoid him as one she was refusing to recognize."

Mrs. Leicester smiled, and, leaning back, crossed her silk-clad knees, and swung a trim foot and glistening ankle into view.

"That is the queer element in the case," she said; "and makes it so interesting. Frankly I don't know the why—if I did, the riddle would be solved."

"But why should she not only refuse to recognize him, but also play that she never knew him?"

"Your 'not only' is comprehended in your 'but also'!" she laughed; "and the answer is, that either Landor is the sort that a woman 'forgets,' or he knows something of her which is not to her credit."

"Of the two, which does your deduction favor—the 'either' or the 'or'?"

"Neither—and both!" she said, placidly. "Her manner at dinner chimed with the former; at the card table, with the latter; in the hall and on the hunt, with neither."

He held to the bantering smile, though his astonishment almost effaced it.

"These amazing powers of analysis," he said, "have you always had them with you?"

"Yes," said she, "yes; and practised them upon you these many years. In fact, I might say, I trained entirely that way."

Harwood grinned broadly; she had pinked him true.

"Which doubtless accounts for your fallacies," he sympathized. "Better take another course off some one else."

She laughed very softly, and drew over close beside him—her blue-black hair brushing his cheek, the violet perfume saturating his face.

"I am about to!" she whispered, catching his arm and holding it to the front, "I'm about to—off Henry Landor. And if it's bad for the lady, I promise that none shall know it but you."

X

THE SNUFF-BOX

If the letter had not been in Henry Landor's mail the next afternoon—or if it had not come while he was at Fairlawn—or if he himself had not come to Fairlawn—or if—— But, why conjecture! Who-ever knows what would have happened, if what did happen had not happened?

As it was, this particular letter lay with other mail on Landor's dressing-table when he came in from a drive over the battle-field; and when he saw the business card in the corner he put the rest aside and read it at once. Then he read it again, very slowly; and a third time, in portions. After which he swore softly but emphatically, and proceeded to clean-up and dress. When he had finished, he sat down; and after going through the letter a fourth time, he turned it over and went to figuring on it, referring, from time to time, to a list on a slip of paper he took from his card-case.

"Oh, hell!—what's the use!" he exclaimed, and stuffed them into his pocket; "Spreader will have to hold off and carry me."

He went over to the window and stood there, staring unseeingly into the blue distance. What to do!

Down on the piazza, Tony Wilberforce was bal-

anced on the rail, swinging his long legs, and glancing over the headlines of a Northumberland morning paper, which had just come in. Suddenly, he gave a whistle of surprise, and looked up at Burgoyne who was standing in the doorway.

"I say, Burgoyne!" he called, "have you seen the news?—Spreader and Hepson have smashed."

Burgoyne nodded. "And nasty, too!—bars, as well as bankruptcy, I fancy."

"Spreader is to blame, of course."

"Entirely. Hepson never had any say."

"I'm sorry for Hepson," said Wilberforce.

"So am I, but none is coming to Spreader. He is the sort that will have plenty laid away.—You didn't trade with them?"

"Not I, my friend!—I'm quite too bare of collateral to trade with anyone."

"You're dead lucky—not a customer will recover his collateral—it will all go for the debts; the courts will treat it as an ordinary asset of the firm."

"What if the collateral is in excess of his debit balance?"

"He will be a general creditor for the difference—and you may be sure that Spreader has been careful to see that there won't be anything for the general creditors."

"How nice! And what if the customer's collateral sells for less than his debit balance?"

"Then the Receiver will request him to come up with the difference."

"Moral—keep low margins at your broker's!" laughed Wilberforce. He caught sight of Landor, at the window above him. "Hello, Landor!" he cried, "did you hear?"

"Yes," said Landor, leaning out, "I heard.—Will it be as bad as you predict, Burgoyne?"

"Just about. I hope you're not hit."

Landor smiled indifferently. "Just a trifle,—practically nothing."—He went back to his chair. "Just a trifle! . . . . practically nothing!" he laughed mirthlessly. "Every dollar I own—and a pile I don't own. Spreader's out, and Receivers don't hold off and carry debit balances. . . . . It is bars and bankruptcy for me, too."

He drew out the letter, and went over the calculation again. Then in a sudden gust of rage, he tore it into bits and flung them on the floor. Straightway, the rage passed.

"Come, come, Landor!" he said: "you're playing the child—you're losing your nerve.—No one is an embezzler until found out. You're busted, all right, but you're not in jail—yet. Get the money somewhere—borrow it—win it—steal it—get it—*get it!*"

He filled a pipe and tramped up and down, blowing great clouds of smoke ceilingward. Fifty thousand dollars was necessary, (the proceeds of a bond sale which he had "borrowed" and used with Spreader and Hepson for additional margin, reporting to his Company that the customer had not yet

lifted them) and Northumberland was hard hit lately.

What, in the recent flush times, would have been a rather easy matter to arrange with his friends on simple notes of hand, was now a proceeding of high finance: they needed all their cash;—everyone in Northumberland needed cash, and got it, if possible —even old friendships didn't go for much there in panic times. So what chance had he! He ran over the names thoughtfully, and shook his head. It was quite hopeless.—Nevertheless, the money must be got.

Suddenly, Hilda Gordon's merry laugh came from the garden. Landor stopped short. *There*, was the solution! The girl was independently and abundantly rich—as her fiancé, it would be easy to obtain the necessary credit. For months they had been having a rather desperate flirtation; now it would be to get serious. He could have married her long ago had he wished—of that he had no doubt; if she did not love him, she was entirely ready to love him. Whether he should actually marry her, was another question—to be considered and determined later; for his present purpose, the betrothal would be quite sufficient.

He laughed softly, knocked the ashes from the pipe, and prepared to descend. He might as well proceed at once to business. Then he chanced to glance out of the side-window, and he paused, frowning. Mrs. Gascoyne was driving up the ave-

nue toward The Oaks. . . . . Could she interfere? . . . . If she did—the smile came again—she would have admitted her identity, and he could extort from her money enough to pay all his debts and losses, and something more. In either event, he stood to win, the woman to lose. Which was as it should be!

And then there was another way—a quicker way. He would put doubt aside, hold to his recognition, and entrap or drive her to admission. She would be glad to buy silence for cash. Yet he knew that here he dared not blunder—dared not accuse and be mistaken. If he were to, the very character of the accusation would destroy him socially, and lose him Hilda Gordon and her ducats. It would be no such situation as could be concluded by an apology, and a confession that he was an egregious ass. If so, it would be easy; apology and confession are not of any consequence save to pride—and pride did not befit one in his dilemma.

He tarried at the window, until the carriage turned in at The Oaks, and he saw Mrs. Gascoyne alight and enter the house; then with sudden resolution, he went quickly down. The hall was deserted; he hurried through, and out to the front piazza. Here he paused; after a casual glance around, he lit a cigarette and strolled down the avenue, with the air of bored aimlessness. He passed The Oaks a little way, turned, and sauntered back to its gate, hesitated an instant, then went in.

Fortune favored him—as he mounted the steps

Mrs. Gascoyne herself opened the door and came out. She was speaking back into the hall, and did not see him. He stopped and waited—to surprise her was luck beyond his wildest hope.

And doubtless she would have betrayed herself, by either voice or countenance, had not the heavy glass panel of the door flashed his reflection on her as by a mirror. It was her warning. She closed the door slowly, and crossed the piazza.

"Why, how-do-you-do, Mr. Landor!" she said, unruffled and smilingly. "Won't you come up?"

He had lost on the surprise.

"I took a chance on your being in," he said, following her into the house; "though you also forbade my coming, yesterday afternoon."

He spoke casually, as a stranger, yet her high-strung nerves instantly detected the faint note of assertiveness, and the change in his attitude.

"I did not forbid," she replied: "I only said I should not be at home for tea. You saw me return, and came over at once—now, didn't you?"

"I did," he smiled; "because I thought you didn't want me."

She did not fall into the trap, and ask why she should not want him.

"If I had not wanted you," with amused toleration, "I'd have said so, instantly."

"You didn't seem to want me yesterday," he persisted.

"You're quite right, I didn't!"

"Why?" he said, quickly.

"Because you were too prone to close up, and to crowd at fences. No one here will want you if you are given to such riding."

Landor smiled imperturbably. "I admire truth —even when it is unflattering."

"I didn't mean to be either critical or invidious," she answered with delicious insouciance. "It may be the way they ride in Northumberland, and it may be the better way—but, you see, it's not our way."

"I am not in the least sensitive," he said;—"on the contrary, I am flattered that you should have noticed my riding."

"You needn't be!" she laughed. "I wasn't noticing your riding; I was watching to see you kill someone.—By the bye, why did you change horses during the check?"

He looked at her curiously.

"I didn't change horses," he said—"at least, not to my knowledge."

"You rode a sorrel, when you joined me; didn't you have a bay, at the start?"

"It was the same horse,—possibly, he bleached out in the run."

"And you were not on a bay, at first?" she persisted. . . . . "No!—then I took someone else for you—doubtless, because I had never seen you but once, and then you were in evening dress; riding togs change a man vastly.—I shouldn't have been so shy of you, had I known."

"Then I may hope for better luck next time?" he asked quickly.

"Hope! surely—every one may hope!" she laughed; "but it never won a place at a fox chase."

She was beginning to enjoy the situation—first, to accuse him of the gravest fault of the hunting field (when, in fact, he hung an unusually good boot), and then to dismiss it indifferently, as a very natural mistake of a brief acquaintance. The whole thing was imaginary, of course; she knew he had not changed horses, nor had she laid eyes on him from start to check. It was a bit hazardous to bring up the matter of identity, but she chanced it because it was emphatic of her attitude that they were strangers, meeting yesterday for the first time.

And she was successful, to the extent of making him cautious, and setting him struggling again against the doubt he had determined should be put aside. It was all very well, in the abstract, to assume that she was playing a part, and to interpret her every word and act, on that hypothesis; but he was finding it very difficult to practise, when directly under the influence of those words and acts. Then he thought of the broker's letter, and it drove him on. He straightened his shoulders, as though throwing off a detaining hand, and went back to the opening she had given.

"It *is* queer," he said, "how a change of dress alters one's appearance. I never attempt to greet chance acquaintances, unless I'm immediately beside

them. Those I have known well, I never mistake. It may be years since I saw them, they may have changed greatly, yet I recognize them instantly and instinctively."

"You should have been a detective, Mr. Landor!" Mildred laughed.

"Sometimes I think so, myself," he replied. "I should particularly enjoy unmasking those who are living under false names."

"And those living under false reputations—what of them?"

"Implying that I should have to be my own first victim?"

"Oh, no! implying that it would be much more profitable to society and the body politic."

"You would put the entire human race in jail!" he exclaimed.

"Well!" she retorted, pretending to smother a yawn, "isn't there where most of it ought to be?"

Landor ignored the hint to go, refused to be led farther afield, and put the theoretical aside with a shrug.

"On the subject of recognitions," he said, watching her narrowly, "I knew you instantly."

"Yes?" she inflected. "And how did I ride—close and crowding, too?"

He smiled tolerantly.

"I was not referring to the hunt," he said, "but to the other evening, when we met in the hall, at Fairlawn."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," she said, with a puzzled frown.

"Then you don't remember me?"

She shook her head. "Would it be very uncivil to admit that I don't? When was it that we met?"

"Something more than ten years ago."

She looked at him steadily, as though striving to recollect.

"I was very young, then," she said, "but my memory is rather accurate, and it refuses to place you. Where did we meet?"

"In Vienna—the last time."

"The last time!—then, we have met more than once?"

He leaned back in the chair, and smiled blandly.

"Many times, many times!"

Her look of amused incredulity broadened into a merry laugh.

"Of course, you are not serious!" she said.

"I never was more so."

"Why, Mr. Landor, how absurd!"—a faint frown coming—."Because I may now resemble a young girl you knew ten years ago—and have not seen since—does not signify that I am she! Doubtless, ten years ago, I didn't resemble her in the least, just as to-day, probably, she does not resemble me."

"Recognition isn't always a matter of face and figure," he replied. "In fact, in both of them you have altered radically, since I saw you last. For

instance: then, your hair was black, blue-black; now,——"

"It is red!" she filled in. "I don't know why I should argue over anything so silly, except it is rather novel to be told, that ten years ago I was some one else. Now, however, are you not proving yourself out of court? My hair is my own, grown right where you see it, not bought; and it is not dyed, either."

Her fingers swept swiftly over it, and with a toss the shining mass slipped down and wrapped around her.

"You are privileged to examine," she said—switching on the light, and standing directly under the brilliant chandelier. "Look close to the head for evidence of dye."

Landor stepped back out of near distance, and bowed.

"My dear Mrs. Gascoyne!" he exclaimed, "I question neither the genuineness of your hair nor its color—on the contrary, my compliments upon them both and their amazing beauty."

She caught the hair, twisted it into a great coil on top of her head, and pinned it tight.

"In what other particular am I altered?" she asked.

"In your voice tones—they were light and brilliant, now they are soft and low."

"*Their* genuineness, however, demands no special proof, I presume?"

"None—none whatever!"

She laughed, with just a suggestion of mockery.

"Out of court!" she exclaimed.

"Not at all!—the other evidence preponderates. And this can be explained."

"Explain it!"

"*I* cannot—maybe you can—some one can."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose 'the other evidence that preponderates' is your intuitive recognition?"

"Not entirely; your eyes—and features—and expression—and certain tricks of manner—all are corroborative of your identity."

She drew over a chair and sat on the arm, one foot swinging in coquetry with her skirts.

"This is interesting!" she laughed. "Perchance I may be permitted to know who I really am."

She said it lightly, as though in gentle raillery, yet, in truth, a perfect horror of fear was upon her. Would he accept the challenge, or would he evade! It was the test of her acting, of her ability to play up to the part. Also, it was the trial of his assurance; if he weakened, now, he would never be so confident again.

For a space, the issue was in doubt. He stared at her with the cold eye of thought; she smiled suavely up at him, though her foot swung a shade more rapidly. Suddenly his expression changed; and she knew that her bluff had won.

"Why mention names unnecessarily?" he asked. "If I am right, you know who you are; if I am mistaken, then it is of no consequence who I thought you were."

And now she crowded him.

"Of no consequence, certainly, right or wrong," she answered; "but it is natural, surely, to ask who one's double is."

He slipped away.

"Was!" he corrected. "It is ten years since I saw her. She may be dead—and, *de mortuis nil*, you know."

"*Ainsi soit-il!*" she returned, with affected solemnity, raising her hand as in benediction. "*Qu'elle repose en paix!*"

"*Soit-il!*" he intoned.

It chimed exactly with his purpose to appear as though rather convinced of his mistake. He was not convinced; he was only discomfited temporarily; but before venturing to renew the attack, he needed more effective ammunition than intuitive recognition and minor physical resemblances. If he could but have a look through the house—particularly in her private apartment! His eyes had been sharply searching the drawing-room. The only thing in it, that suggested even possible results, was the crystal cabinet in the far rear-corner, but the reflections on the glass obscured the interior. He was about to go over to it, when the sad-faced, droopy-eyed butler appeared noiselessly in the doorway.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Gascoyne.

"The telephone, madame!" was the monotone.

The man wheeled aside, fingers at trouser seams, until Mrs. Gascoyne had passed; then, for just a second as he turned to follow, the low lids lifted, and the shrewd, small eyes, swept over Landor with a snaky glitter, as he crossed to the cabinet.

It was one of the gold-frame, plate-glass, Louis Quinze imitations, that, at one period, were an absolutely indispensable ornament to all well-ordered drawing-rooms—and wherein were displayed, usually, a lot of commonplace bijoutry and baubles, ranging from a sea-shell of the Jersey Coast to a fake intaglio from Milan, or a bit of imitation jade from India.

Mrs. Gascoyne, however, had made a clean sweep of the gew-gaws, which were resting now in security of a safe-deposit vault. In their place, were a dozen beautiful French and Italian old fans, carved and painted and decorated as only the masters of that now lost art, could do. All were exquisitely beautiful; every one an exponent of its type; some had belonged to famous women of Valois and Bourbon days; all had caressed fair cheeks, touched red lips, been flirted over, listened to love tones and vows, and joined in cold dismissals.

But their charms were lost upon Landor. To him, a fan was a fan—so much wood or silk or bone which could be put to better use. He knew nothing of the Fan; its antiquity and its styles, nor

of the part it had played in the dramas and the comedies of courts and diplomacy.

So he passed them over for the other things on the glass shelves:—bits of old English-silver, cameos, scarabs, ivories, mosaics. These he examined, piece by piece. He was searching for something that could aid him—something that he should recognize as having been hers ten years ago. . . . . He frowned as he went swiftly yet carefully over them and found nothing. The minutes passed rapidly; it did not occur to him how long Mrs. Gascoyne had been absent—he was only fearful lest she come before he had done with the cabinet. . . . . Ah!—Ah!—was it possible!—Down on the lowest shelf, back in the shadow of a quaint little fan of ivory and silk, lay a small odd-shaped object—a narrow silver cone, the apex curled over on the side, the base, a hinged top set with a large Scotch-pebble, deep pink and full of fire. It was the snuff-box of a Highland Chief,—or the mate of it—that he had seen many times, in the hands of the woman-in-question; for it was then, fashion again had decreed, that comfits must be carried.

If he could have it into his hands to examine, he would know.—He tried the door—it was locked, and the key not in it. With a muttered curse, he dropped on one knee beside the cabinet to get as close as possible. Then the sudden thud, of some one bounding up the piazza steps, brought him instantly to his feet and a fresh oath to his lips. He was

up, looking idly out of the nearby window, when the droopy-eyed man-servant shot in at him a side-long glance, as he passed to the front door.

"Is Mr. Landor here?" it was Harwood's voice.—"In the drawing-room!—Oh, Mrs. Gascoyne, how-do-you-do!" (Landor could not see her look of glad welcome, nor know the grateful pressure of those slender fingers.) "I'm so sorry to take your visitor away, but will you excuse him?—Landor, old man, I'm called this minute to the town on business —important Long Distance—haven't got it in the house, it seems, only the local lines. I'm hundreds ahead at a little game that all the men are in; I don't want to drop out; won't you go over, and play my hand and chips until I get back?—You understand, Mrs. Gascoyne——"

"Of course I do!" she laughed. "Go, by all means, Mr. Landor!"

Whatever may have been Landor's irritation, he hid it behind an impassive face.

"I'll go!" he said, with a gracious smile; "but I think my dear host" (laying his hand intimately on Harwood's shoulder) "is only trying to displace me."

"No! no! if you think so, wait until the machine comes; it will pick me up here; I didn't delay for it."

"Oh, nonsense! of course I'll go. Good afternoon, Mrs. Gascoyne!" obliging her to give him her hand; and noting with satisfaction that it was un-

duly cold.—" Oh, may I wait just a second—long enough, Mrs. Gascoyne, to have a look at that queer, silver snuff-box in the cabinet yonder? You see, I was spying around while you were out."

His eyes were hard on hers, and this time he caught a flash of surprise—but no glint of alarm or fear.

" Surely ! " she replied—" why didn't you take it out? "

" I might have—had the cabinet not been locked."

" The key is in the door."

" No, it isn't ! " said Landor.

" Then it is on the floor. Come !—Oh, I'm stupid. It was trod on yesterday and broken; a new one is being made. I'll try to have it here when you come again."

" Please don't trouble," Landor answered; " I'm deeply mortified that I mentioned the box—but it is so like one I used to see frequently, that I wanted to compare them. I'm sure they were made by the same smith." He took her hand again—it was warm now, too warm. " Good-by ! " he said, bowing over it.

The droopy-eyed butler closed the door softly behind him, glanced covertly at the pair in the drawing-room, and passed silently down the hall and to the rear.

Instantly, Mildred sprang to the front window; Landor was swinging rapidly down the walk. She turned impulsively to Harwood; and never had he

thought to see for him, on any woman's face, such a look of supreme gratitude and delight.

"How can I ever thank you!" she cried.

Suddenly her soft arms slipped around his neck, and she kissed him lightly on the lips; then she sprang back, her face scarlet with embarrassment.

Harwood had made no effort to hold her, nor even to return her kiss. Now he went to her and took her hand.

"I *am* thanked!" he said, and his voice was very low; "thanked beyond the power of any other woman in the world."

For just the briefest interval, these two stood at gaze; then the lovely face went scarlet again, the long lashes veiled their eyes, and she put out her hand, as though to ward him off.

"You were good to come!" she said nervously.—"There is your car!—you can hurry to your business now—don't let me keep you another instant!"

He laughed gayly, almost joyously.

"Business! you know I had no business in Egerton, nor anywhere but here—in answer to your call. The car is a bluff for Landor; it was not to leave the Hall until he had passed your gates. In fact, everything was a bluff but the game; it, thank the Lord, is true!—it was the key of the whole play."

"You did it beautifully!—beautifully. Yet I shouldn't have telephoned you—I shouldn't have tangled you in my troubles. I have no right to——"

"Are you quite sure of that?" he broke in—"quite sure, you have no right?"

Again the lashes fluttered and dropped, and the warding hand went out.

"Quite sure!" she answered, slowly, almost dispiritedly—"quite sure! . . . . He came upon me suddenly! I had no escape. I controlled myself, until I was called out—when I tried to return I weakened—I couldn't drive myself back. My only thought was to get rid of him—or to get some one here.—The telephone suggested a way, and you were nearest. Then I waited until I heard your voice at the door. Never again! never! shall I be so glad to see anyone!"

Weak with the reaction from the strain, she had dropped on a chair, and did not seem to realize that Harwood was standing over her, one hand holding hers, the other lightly stroking with its finger tips her glorious hair.

"Shall I pack him off?" he asked. "He shall go in the morning, if you wish."

She gently freed her hand, shaking her head at him reprovingly, and then denying it with her intimate little smile.

"No," she said, "let him stay. It could only postpone matters a little while; he would come back to Egerton, or follow me about if I went away; so the quicker we fight it out the better."

"Then at Fairlawn he stays, so long as I can hold him!"

"You are good, m'sieur—quite too good! But I fear that you risk too much; if I lose, there may be scandal—there may be scandal, anyway."

"Scandal!" he laughed. "Do you fancy I should care for such scandal as you could be in—or any scandal that touched you?"

She thanked him with a look of entire trust, and arose.

"That miserable snuff-box!" she exclaimed, as her glance fell on the cabinet. "The one thing in this room that man should not have seen! You observed how quickly he used your presence to force me to let him examine it."

"Yes," said Harwood, "and how he failed. But, if you wish him not to see it, I advise that you forget to obtain the key."

She smiled rather sadly.

"I seem to have played it fairly well," she remarked. "The key isn't broken; it is upstairs in my jewel-box—the fans and trinkets are too valuable to be fingered by servants. But I hate to lie."

"It is only a lie to deceive maliciously," he replied, moving toward the hall. "Any one is a fool to answer truthfully either impertinent questions, or questions intended to one's harm—and this applies to actions, too."

"You're so satisfactory, m'sieur!" she exclaimed, pausing just inside the drawing-room door and giving him her hand. "Your philosophy is delightful—and your magnanimity!—I believe that you

have not even wondered why I hate and fear Henry Landor."

"Then it wasn't only because I was nearest that you thought of me?" he demanded, drawing her slowly toward him.

She struggled faintly.

"Don't! please, don't!" she said brokenly, as his arms went around her, and held her close.

"Tell me, sweetheart!" he whispered, "was it for *any* of those reasons that you wanted me?"

She stood quite still, gleaming hair against his arm and shoulder, fair face upturned to his.

"No!" she said, smiling at him, with eyes in which he read full confession. "No! it was not."

She met his kiss in honest lover-fashion; then slipped swiftly from his arms;—and when, surprised, he followed and would have had her back, she slipped away once more.

"Never again, m'sieur!" she said,—and the very sorrow in her voice stayed him. "I have told you truth because I love you, but there is no dream of marrying for us two. From this moment, forget all that has passed between us here.—Do not, I pray you, dear! oh, do not! make it any harder for me than it is. Trust me! trust me, sweetheart, when I say it cannot be."

Harwood took the hands she held out impulsively to him.

"Do you think," said he, with the calm assurance of the man who always gets his way, "that now,

after waiting for you all these years, I shall let you go?"

She shook her head hopelessly, though she loved his words, and the will behind them.

"It is useless, dear," she said, "quite useless! there is no hope.—Go now, please—the tears are coming, and I want to be alone."

He bent and kissed the glorious hair.

"Until to-morrow!" he answered—and went quickly from the room.

XI

CONCERNING HAIR AND HOUSEBREAKING

Puzzled and thoughtful, Landor went slowly back to the Hall. Harwood's arrival had been so amazingly opportune as almost to suggest prearrangement; yet it was rather beyond belief that Mrs. Gascoyne would venture to confide in a stranger. Moreover, the advantage had been wholly with her until he found the snuff-box, and, then, Harwood was already at the piazza steps. Of course, she might have telephoned to him, but in that case, from the manner of his entrance, the message must have been to come over and take his guest away—which was scarcely probable. Yet, even if she had made such request, it was of small consequence, beyond possibly putting him in bad odor with his host.

He had not the least doubt now of Mrs. Gascoyne's real identity, the snuff-box had settled it, and also had determined him in his purpose. To-morrow afternoon he would ask to see it; for her to refuse or to temporize was tantamount to confession; and even if she were to continue the bluff and show the box, there were certain marks on the inside of the lid that would confound her—though it were quite possible, if they had not been removed

long ago, she would now, in precaution, have every scratch rubbed out. However, if the box were to be in its place by to-morrow afternoon, she would have only a few hours for the doing—and silversmiths, even in small towns, were, he knew, not given to finishing a job promptly, or when promised. As for the tale of the broken key, he simply did not believe it.

As he reached Fairlawn, the car whirled out and down the avenue toward The Oaks, and he paused until he saw it swing into the driveway. In the hall, William met him with a telegram.

"It was delivered just a few minutes ago, sir," he said.—"The gentlemen are in the billiard-room."

Landor nodded, and read the wire as he descended. It was from his Firm, and very much to the point:—

"Remit instantly proceeds of Hampton bonds. Why such delay?"

"Oh, go to the devil!" he muttered, and tore the yellow sheet into tiny fragments.

He took Harwood's place at the table, counted the chips stacked there, and had Burgoyne verify it. The game was a pretty stiff one, he quickly perceived; for while the limit was moderate enough, it was lifted after the draw, if any one so requested. The luck that had been with Harwood, clung even more persistently to him. After the first hand, he put aside the other's chips, and played thereafter on

velvet—except once, when he borrowed all the blues, and made the big kill of the evening.

Harwood came in, just as the dressing-bell sounded and the game ended.

"Well, Landor, do I owe you anything?" he asked.

"Not exactly!" was the reply, and the others laughed; "the chips you left for me are yonder, on the billiard-table—here, are a few more," indicating the big pile before him, "I managed to accumulate for you."

"For me!" Harwood laughed. "Well I reckon not—I'll keep my winnings, and you'll keep yours. Thunder, man, between us we've not left them enough for penny-bridge! It's like stealing from children."

Landor pushed the chips into the centre of the table, among the scattered cards, and got up. He wanted the money; he needed it, heaven knew; but the wise play was to refuse.

"Oh, no!" he said, quietly. "It's very nice in you, old man, but I was playing your hand and your money. I'm only glad I didn't lose."

"Well, we will compromise," said Colleton, seeing that the other would not recede; "each shall take half, or we will give it all to charity—which shall it be?"

"Charity, of course!"

"Oh, hell!" Wilberforce broke out, "why throw away good money! besides, it's tainted, no charity

would venture to accept it. Act like a pair of sensible human beings—divide."

"That settles it!" said Harwood. "We never appeal from Tony's decision on a card question."

And Landor, with just the proper show of reluctance, acquiesced and took his share of the winnings—enough, with reasonable economy, to support him many months, should he be obliged to seek refuge where the writ of extradition did not run.

But he had no wish to become a fugitive from justice, slinking to some opera-bouffe country, there to mark time, until the very horror of the suspense, the blackmail, the fear of betrayal, were to send him back to seek relief and freedom through trial and legal punishment. He could face with equanimity the loss of his small capital and the prospect of bankruptcy, and even the lock-step and the stripes were not so fearful, when in the distance; but now the distance was cut out, and they were looming right in front of him. He had counted on at least a week before the Firm would become suspicious, and in that time he could easily have either forced the money from Mrs. Gascoyne, or won the Gordon girl. Now, it was likely a matter of two days, and the quickest road to redemption lay by way of The Oaks.

As he dressed, he went over the situation carefully. The chance of being mistaken in the snuff-box was too infinitesimal for consideration; even

that a mate existed was unlikely enough, but that it should be in the possession of one who was a double of the other woman, was simply incredible. Yet, in a game against time, there must be no ground for question nor delay; Mrs. Gascoyne's real identity must be established before to-morrow evening, beyond her power to refute. The snuff-box would do it. It was a happy fortune that had brought Harwood to The Oaks. Harwood knew the box had not been taken from the cabinet, and had heard him ask for the latter to be opened, only to be put off with the excuse of a broken key. Consequently he could not have seen the marks on the interior of the box. He would write a description of them, and leave it under seal with Harwood himself. Even Mrs. Gascoyne's beauty, equivocation, and tears, would be unavailing against such evidence; though he had little notion that it would be necessary to use it. She would yield the instant she saw his proofs; she was quite too sensible to persist in the face of sure exposure. Of course, there was the possibility that she would defy him and refuse to buy his silence, but it was too slender to support even a casual thought—and if she did, there was still another way to coerce her.

His play, however, required absolute certainty of the marks being in the box—he would hazard no bluff with so much to lose, if he blundered—To that end, he must get his hands on it before to-morrow morning. And there were but two ways

of doing it: to bribe a servant, or to do the burglar himself. The former was not practicable, in so short a time; he knew, by sight, only the droopy-eyed butler—and him, he would not venture to approach, without a very much longer acquaintance, even though there was something venal and tricky in the fellow's smug face. It was for him to manage alone—to be his own criminal.

He glanced at the clock; there was still a quarter of an hour until dinner. He lit a cigarette, and, turning on the desk-light, wrote on a sheet of the Fairlawn note-paper an exact description of the marks on the interior of the snuff-box, when he knew it, ten years previous. This he sealed in an envelope, put his name on the front, and went down stairs, where, at his request, Harwood put it in a locked compartment of the safe in the library.

Landor's place, that evening at dinner, was beside Mrs. Leicester; which gave him some surprise and considerable gratification, and Harwood considerable amusement and some misgiving.

It is a woman's way to flatter a man when she wants to get something out of him, and her success depends simply on the method employed. Some men are responsive only to flattery by suggestion; others want it administered with a club or a fire hose; between these extremes are an infinite number of gradations. The whole art is in picking the proper grade. And in this instance, Evelyn had shown her usual cleverness. To Landor, she was

still, one of the few unattainables. He had never been able to penetrate the barrier of courteous indifference, that always barred his way. Now, she herself had voluntarily removed the barrier and invited him within:—he had heard Harwood tell her at luncheon, that thereafter the places at table were to be arranged by her. That there might be any ulterior motive, in her sudden change of attitude, did not even occur to him; it was simply one more victory for courteous persistence, and calm indifference to snubs. Nor was he any the less pleased, when he saw Hilda Gordon's dark eyes smile approvingly; he knew that he had another point in his favor, when he came to the marriage proposition.

It was very easy for Evelyn to bring the talk around to yesterday's meet; all she had to do, was keep off the subject, and wait for Landor; it was as certain as sunset, that he would refer to her winning the brush. It came about before the entrée; and, presently, they were talking of Mrs. Gascoyne—of her splendid riding, her rare beauty, and graciousness, and then of the peculiarity, that a woman of her sort should be living here.

"If she were an Egertonian, or even of Egerton stock, it might be understood," said Evelyn; "but she isn't, you know; she is a stranger."

"So I have supposed," he answered. "She is too evidently a cosmopolite to belong anywhere in particular, save *en route*."

"How very true!" she exclaimed; "and don't you know, I am sure that years ago, somewhere, I saw her *en route*."

His black eyes swept her face with a flying glance.

"You could not well mistake," he said; "her wonderful hair, in itself, would identify her beyond question."

Evelyn repressed a smile. So, it was the hair that troubled him; possibly, when he had known her, it was not red.

"That is just my difficulty," she replied; "the red hair does not belong; yet, somehow I can't fix certainly the color which fits—it seems to me that it was black."

His quick look at her own hair, had given her the color as surely as words.

"How do you explain it—dye?" he asked. "To my unskilled eyes, the hair is her own."

"Undoubtedly, it's her own! The red is genuine, too, so the black must have been dye."

"When was it that you saw her?"

"Oh—at least—seven years ago, maybe more, somewhere in Europe—Venice I think. As I remember, we were in the same hotel."

She had made it seven years, because some considerable period—enough, at her then age, to work other changes in appearance—must have elapsed since he had seen Mrs. Gascoyne, else he would have recognized her confidently, regardless of the altered hair.

"If the dye were not applied in seven years, would it fade completely, and the hair regain its original color?" he asked.

"No; the dyed portion would always be radically different in shade from the new hair."

"Could the old portion be re-dyed to match, exactly, the new?"

"I fancy so," she laughed, "but it would require great skill and constant attention to maintain; though, as a fact, very few women have hair of one constant shade; usually, it is lighter at the ends than near the head—sometimes, very considerably. Mrs. Gascoyne's, however, is one of the few—hers seems to show no variation; it is solid, burnished copper."

"Could it not be new—all of it? That is, might she not have cut off the dyed portion?"

"Possibly, not probably; it's too long for seven years; yet, care and attention work wonders, and some hair grows with amazing rapidity. Ten years, however, would be a likelier period—though I can't think that it was so long ago, I saw her."

"Then it could be all new in ten years?" he asked.

"Yes—very readily!"

"Why shouldn't you ask her if she remembers you?" with a significant glance at the blue-black hair.

"That wouldn't bother *her*—mine has always been the same color!" she smiled. "And I may ask

her sometime, when I've known her a little longer. On first acquaintance, there is nothing quite so wooden as resemblances, or the fool 'haven't I seen you before?' It is a pity it doesn't always result disastrously."

"As it did to the clergyman who remarked to his neighbor in the street car, that his face was very familiar, and got the answer, that it was quite likely, as he was one of the guards in the penitentiary."

"Which brings us to antiques!" she laughed, and turned to answer a question from Wilberforce, called the length of the table.

Thereafter, during dinner, Mrs. Gascoyne was not mentioned. Evelyn was well content with the results of her first trial. Landor was more than content with this opportune information as to feminine hair and its dyes. Nor was it to his purpose, now, to discuss Mrs. Gascoyne with anyone.

"Well, Evelyn!" said Harwood, later in the evening, as they stood alone for a moment in the hall, "what success?—what did you wheedle out of him?"

"I don't like your tone, and I don't like the form of your question!" she retorted, airily.

"Madame, I fear, does not understand," he said, with affected humility;—"my words were but an extremely polite way of asking, whether your skilful finesse and brilliant mind had separated Landor from certain facts within his knowledge."

"I shouldn't ever have imagined it—yet I'm quite sure I prefer it to the paraphrase. Yes, I wheedled something out of him; and I flatter myself he doesn't even suspect it. He did recognize Mrs. Gascoyne; he knew her ten years ago—and, then, her hair was black. To-morrow, I'll wheedle some more—here he comes! Take me away; I don't want him again this evening."

Landor, however, was not thinking of her; he had other business, then, town-ward. He went on out to the avenue, and swung off at a brisk pace, which slowed down sharply as he passed The Oaks. Housebreaking not being his avocation, he had not looked the place over with a burglarious eye, nor indeed with any eye. He knew there was a house, with a front piazza; as to its structure or appearance, he had not the remotest recollection. Now, he intended to examine it with the utmost care for detail.

But it was full of light; all the shades on the lower floor were up, and he dared not venture nearer than the hedge. However, he could see that low French-windows opened on the piazza; and this was promising, they ought to be easy to force.

A little further on, he turned into the gravel path that led down the hill and across the flat to the town. He stopped a moment at the forks of the street, to look at the bronze soldier, that seemed to be striving so vigorously to get free from the granite boulder on which it stood; then he

crossed the pike, and hit the brick sidewalk at the west end of the main town. And he continued to hit it, on an average of three steps in five, notwithstanding, when he reached the telegraph office, a third of a mile further on, he was lifting his feet like a string-haltered horse.

It was simply another demonstration of the theory, now accepted generally by savants, that the original rag-timer was a city chap trying, for the first time, to locomote over a village sidewalk.

At the office, Landor filed three messages; two he had with him, the third he wrote at a narrow window, with thick, smeary ink and a worn-out pen. It was to the Firm, and aimed for further time and a suspension of judgment:—

"Draft for proceeds of bonds mailed you last Saturday. Will have matter investigated from Northumberland, immediately."

On the return, to Fairlawn, he stopped at a shop for a cigar.

"You're one of them out at Harwood's, ain't you?" said the persimmon-face clerk.

Landor nodded.

"I saw you'ns come. By gosh, but that's a powerful high-stepping lot of weemen with you!"

"We brought that sort on account of the sidewalks," said Landor.

"I'll tell you, I've seen a mighty lot of weemen in this here old town, a doin' the battle-field, you know, gov'ners' wives and daughters, and congress-

men's and ginerals', and such like, but there ain't never been none as could tetch these her'n of yours. Might they all have come from Northumberland?"

"Yes," said Landor, waiting for the change from the note, the man still held in his dirty fingers.

"And might any be Harwood's woman?"

"What!" said Landor, sharply.—"Oh, I see; you mean his wife. No, none is Mr. Harwood's wife—he isn't married."

"Nor ain't going to be?"

"My good man, you must ask Mr. Harwood such intimate, personal questions. I'm only a friend, you know."

The sarcasm was quite lost.

"Well, it 'pears mighty queer, that a feller as old as him, and rich, ain't had no woman yet—he'll need one now, in that place out yonder. I ain't never been in it, but there must be a power of floors to scrub."

"Yes, there surely are a power of floors to scrub!" Landor laughed. "Some money coming to me, I believe."

The man rang open the drawer, but showed no hurry to produce the coin.

"I say, Mr.—what might your name be?"

"Smith!" said Landor, curtly.

"That's my name, too;—reckon we ain't no kin?"

"I'm quite sure we are not!—Give me three more of these cigars, and keep the dollar."

"I say, Smith," the native went on, adroitly knocking from the box the card: "25c. or 5 for $1.00," and watching Landor choose three cigars instead of four—"maybe Harwood will hitch up with the widder next door!" and he shut one eye and grinned. "Now, there's a high-stepper, too! —She's got half the young sports in town, and some of the old ones, dancin' around her like jumpin'-jacks. I reckon you'ns know'd her before you come;" (his little ferret-eyes drilling at Landor) "but if you did, it's more as we did. We don't know *now* who she is, or where she come from. No one knows but Jim Casson, and he's her lawyer; and lawyers, you know, never do no talking what tells. There is them who says, it's scand'lous doin's for a pretty woman like her to be livin' out there alone, with only another woman they call her 'company,' and a bottler in the house all the time, not to speak of the hosler, and the other help."

"But, of course, to such dirty scandal," said Landor, pausing in the doorway, "a broad-minded man like you would always answer, that you never meddle in the affairs of others, nor criticise their doings."

Leaving the foul-minded maligner staring at him in dull-witted surprise, he went out, and resumed his rag-time walk toward Fairlawn.

In The Oaks, now, the lights were subdued, and the shades were drawn. Landor stopped at the gate. He could see the entire length of the drive-

way, which led straight to the house, but the lawn, on either side, was dark and forbidding. However, no one of the establishment was likely to be skulking there, and after a moment's hesitation he went cautiously up the path, a little way, then turned aside among the trees. Presently, he was under the drawing-room windows.

Even his inexperienced eye saw that he need seek no further for a place of entrance. The sash were ill-fitting, and so far apart that the catch could be sprung very easily with a wire or knife. However, he drew himself up on the piazza and had a look at the low French-windows. They fastened with bolts in the centre, and at both top and bottom. The side would be the easier way in. He slid quietly to the ground, and, gaining the shadow of the trees, hurried back to the gate.

As he neared Fairlawn, a man, who was coming down the far side of the avenue, stopped, and peered across at him.

"I say, boss!" he called, coming over, "can't you give a bum the price of a bunk for to-night?"

Ordinarily, Landor would have gone on, either entirely ignoring the fellow, or flinging him a bit of silver; now, however, an idea came to him suddenly.

"Stop where you are!" he ordered, sharply. "Let me have a look at you!"

"Inspection, parade! — 'Tention!" the man snapped out, and fell into position.

"You have served in the Army?" Landor asked.

"In the Imperial Guard!"

"The what!"

"The Imperial Guard, sir, alias the Rough Riders, alias the Heroes of Hot Air. Motto: 'By our jobs shall we be known'!"

"And what has happened to *your* office?" Landor laughed.

"That, mighty signor, is a secret betwixt me Emperor and me. At present, I am taking the walking test. If you lend me a five-spot I shall speak you well to him."

"And what should you do, if I gave you five five-spots?"

"Fall dead, sir!"

"Well, I'm sorry——"

"I'm feeling stronger now, sir—I think I can survive the shock. What's to do—burn the bloomin' town?"

"No," said Landor; "only a little friendly burglaring."

"I pass! me for the grit! the price for friendly burglaring is ten five-spots per."

"Too expensive!" said Landor, turning away.

"One moment, my lord—that's the Burglars' Union scale—I'll cut it to six, if you keep mum."

"Very well, six it is. Be at the rear of this garden at two o'clock. We can pull off the job in ten minutes."

"Is that there the crib to be cracked?" twisting a dirty thumb toward Fairlawn.

"No! that is my house. My friend's is close by."

"Just what's the job, monseer?"

"The job," said Landor, "is to get a small article that is in a room on the first floor. I'll explain exactly, at two o'clock, and show you where to enter the house."

"I'll be on hand, sir.—Couldn't you cough up a dollar, on account?"

"There's too much booze in a dollar—here's a quarter. Two o'clock, my man!" and Landor went on.

The tramp watched him until he had entered Fairlawn.

"It's queer-shakes—friendly burglaring!" he muttered, turning toward the town; "but five-spots is scarce these days, and me for them."

XII

THE ROUT OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD

For a long while after Harwood had gone, Mildred Gascoyne lay crumpled among the pillows of the couch in her boudoir, whither she had fled the moment the door closed behind him.

Was Landor's presence not sufficient misfortune, that she should have provoked the cataclysm!—What had possessed her to yield to the impulse of sudden and overpowering love!—What right had she to love anyone!—How was it, that she should have put love aside contemptuously, all these years, only to succumb, now, almost upon sight—and to succumb so utterly as to have no shame! She had kissed him first!—she had led all the demonstration!—everything! He had done only what courtesy obliged!—and, womanlike, she held to it; though her heart told her otherwise, as had his lips, and arms, and the light in his steady eyes.

Why had she been so imprudent! why had she not fled by the quickest train—away from Landor, and his accusing recognition—away from the Master of Fairlawn—away from whatever threatened her peace of mind. It was easy to see the blunder, now—now, that Harwood had failed her. She had counted on his aid, and he himself had made it impossible. What right had he to fall in love with

her!—what reason had she to anticipate such inconsiderateness! And what mad folly had led her to fall in love with him! It was a shameful situation! and all her fault! Why should she not end it; why bother more!—Why not tell Harwood the truth—defy Landor—and go from Egerton forever! Rather, why not do the last, only—go from Egerton in the morning, without a word, and lose herself from the Past, even as she had thought to do here.

Then gradually the tempest of incoherence and despair subsided, and she began to see things in their true perspective. There was no need, really, to refuse Harwood's aid, because of his sudden change from friend to lover, if, before she accepted it, he were made to know the truth, and the hopelessness of his passion. Nor was there any necessity to flee forthwith. Landor's persistent efforts to unmask her, were, she knew, not due to curiosity—he wanted money; and until he were able to prove his recognition, he would not venture to threaten. When the threat came, would be time enough for her to go—and the going would depend upon the then conditions, and her ability to fight back. All this complication had arisen in exactly seven days; it might solve itself in as many more. And at least in that time, she should see Harwood again. It was not within her courage to leave without another word, without a last touch of his hand; perchance, a touch of his lips—if he wished it, and imposed it

by force; nor sparing the force. Hers was the spirit, now, that cried for a rough wooing, and a masterful man.

She sprang from the couch, and stood before the mirror.

"Why can't you have me, sweetheart!" she exclaimed. "Why should a hoary canon of convention hold us apart! Why shouldn't I——"

Surely she was losing the little sense she had! It was more than red hair and a pretty face that a man wanted. Honor was honor still, with a Harwood—a clean record and an honest name. It was just as well that Henry Landor had come; she would have to hold to the way of duty, even though it lay through the valley of renunciation and despair.

Then, for the first time, she remembered Mrs. Leicester, and cried out in sharp humiliation. She had forgot! Harwood was pledged. She had been making love to an engaged man; and he had suffered it out of courtesy and——

She flung up her head disavowingly. No! no! that she would not believe. Rumor had lied. Judge Casson was mistaken; he must have inferred it; Harwood had not told him. His very action, in itself, was denial:—she could no more doubt his affection and his sincerity, than she could doubt his honor.

A faint, little scratch sounded at the door. Mildred smiled welcomingly, and raised the latch.

"Come in!" she called.

A more vigorous scratch sent the door ajar, and the little white dog, fresh from his bath and an hour's sleep after it, dashed in and sprang to her arms, snuggling his soft head close to hers, and whimpering gently for joy.

"What gown will madame wear?" said the maid, who followed.

"The black-spangled net—and make haste, Lizette; I'm very late. There is a guest for dinner."

"I thought madame slept, so I waited; the caniche would have come, long ago."

"Of course!" Mildred laughed, putting the dog carefully among the cushions of the couch, and dropping a caressing hand on the fleecy head. "Lie there, boy, while Missy dresses."

Chum curled up, and watched the maid suspiciously; he could not get reconciled to anyone touching his mistress, and he seemed actually to suffer, when Lizette was busy about her, and he had to stay away.

The guest was Judge Casson; come, also, in his professional capacity, to pass upon a business matter, which had arisen that day and required prompt decision. Mildred always had him to dinner when she needed his advice; it was a courtesy to him, a convenience to her, and saved time for them both.

"Put blue on Chum, and send him down," she said, as Lizette fastened the last hook, and handed

her the flimsy bit of spider-web that does duty for a woman's handkerchief.

"Are you afraid to dine with me alone, Judge Casson?" she asked, when the droopy-eyed butler bowed his monotone announcement, from the doorway. "Mrs. Jamison is indisposed, this evening."

"Afraid!" the Judge exclaimed, offering his arm with the sweeping flourish of the old régime, "I'm tremendously afraid, but I'm too happy to know it."

In the dining-room, he peremptorily waved Brown away from Mrs. Gascoyne's chair, and did the service himself.

"A—h!" he sighed, settling into his place, and smiling across the small round table at her. "This is delightful, simply delightful. May there be many more like it!"

"You wish to condemn Mrs. Jamison to chronic invalidism?"

"I would condemn myself to it, for such a compensation."

"That is the first ungallant remark I've ever heard from you," she returned, regretfully.

"My dear lady, I protest! Mrs. Jamison's illness is not a necessary prerequisite for this charming —solitude of two."

"No, of course, no!" (with a quick glance at him through her long lashes—was he going to get sentimental?) "Brown could serve her upstairs."

"A capital idea, if only to keep him away from here!"

"Don't you like Brown?" she asked, artlessly.

"I decline to discuss the disagreeable, now!" he laughed. "Moreover, there are other ways of disposing of Mrs. Jamison than by illness."

"For instance?"

"Send her away."

"I'd have to get another in her place; Egerton would be scandalized into a week of prayer, if I were to live here alone."

The Judge leaned across, and looked at her steadily.

"Get another in her place!" he said.

"My dear man, what would that advantage? Mrs. Jamison is most satisfactory and companionable."

"Certainly, she is; Mrs. Jamison is a very superior woman; but why have a——" He broke off, frowning.

"Have a what?" Mildred asked.

"I'll tell you when that meek-faced, automatic man-servant takes his ear from the crack of the pantry door.—It is gone, now; but I'll wait until he is not even within hearing distance."

And he waited until he arose to take his leave, several hours later, after the business matters were gone over and determined.

"My dear client," he said, "will you permit a bit of advice, that does not lie within my privilege as either counsellor or friend?"

"Why surely, Judge Casson! You are privileged

to speak to me as frankly as my own father might do, were he living."

The old man bowed, and, going to the door, looked into the hall.

"I'll walk to the gate with you," she suggested.

He offered his arm, instantly; she caught up a scarf, and flung it around her bare shoulders.

"It has been much on my mind, lately," he began, as they went down the piazza steps, "yet I have hesitated to presume; now, the reference to Mrs. Jamison has brought it forcibly to mind, again." He bent over, earnestly. "My dear young woman, you should marry—you should marry!"

Mildred laughed mirthlessly, and shook her head.

"A burnt child fears the fire!" she said.

Judge Casson looked gravely down at her. It was the first time she ever had referred to her previous experience—Mr. Gascoyne's name, she never mentioned.

"Very true of a child," he agreed; "an adult becomes the more careful."

"It's none the less fire."

"Fire is a blessing under normal conditions."

"Fire isn't man," she replied. "Fire is an element controlled by immutable laws; man is a variable compound, controlled by no laws whatever."

"Are you not extreme, my lady—can you say *you* have never known a man who was dependable?"

"No, I can't!—there are exceptions, I——"

"Then one of the exceptions is the man for you."

She gave him a quizzical smile.

"The man I had particularly in mind," she said, "is yourself."

The wrinkled face flushed, he took her hand and held it, lightly, deferentially.

"My dear little girl," he said, "I am not such a silly, old fool as to imagine I am *the* exception. Were I a quarter of a century younger, I would take my chance; now, it is for me only to love you with an old man's affectionate regard, and stand your devoted mentor. That is why I urge you to marry."

"Have you the man picked out?" Mildred asked.

"No—but there must be plenty who are ready and waiting."

"In Egerton?"

"Not in Egerton—we have none here who mate with you."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I've been here for more than six months, have you known of any stranger coming to see me?"

"That is because you have not permitted them to come."

"It is because I have never permitted them to know me well enough to want to come."

"It's a pity, a great pity, that the Master of Fairlawn is already affianced."

"Isn't it!" Mildred laughed—"and to such a beauty as Mrs. Leicester—I suppose you mean her."

"Yes, I mean Mrs. Leicester.—Why don't you take him away from her? By gracious, maybe they are not betrothed! he did not tell me; I only assumed it from his talk, the evening I met him. I'll find out, to-morrow, from one of the party if it has been announced; if it has not, go in and take him, little woman, go in and take him!"

Mildred gave a quiet sigh of delight. Her trust in Harwood had not been vain—he was *not* promised to another when he offered himself to her.

"What if I don't want him?" she asked.

She failed to keep the delight entirely out of her voice, and the Judge detected it.

"Are you quite sure you could not want him?" he said quietly.

She leaned forward on his arm, and looked up at him.

"Don't you think, sir," she said, "that it should be time enough for me to consider whether I want him, when he has shown that he wants me?"

"Sometimes a clever woman can lead a man to know what he wants."

They had come to the gate; he turned to take her back to the house. She refused; and was firm against his insistence.

"Promise me," he said, as she gave him her hand in good-night; "that you will not turn Harwood aside unheard, if he seek you."

"I promise!" she answered, promptly.

And the Judge went down to the town, his heart

warm with the prospect; now that he had come to doubt the engagement, he was remembering that Harwood had shown, from the first, a marked liking for Mrs. Gascoyne.

Mildred passed slowly back to the house, her assumed light-hearted indifference turned to dull wretchedness. How hopeless it was!—how savagely fatalistic! All the errors of her life assembled for her punishment! Would she turn Harwood aside, unheard! Oh, the mockery of it.

In the hall, Chum met her with whimpers of affection, and little grumbles of complaint at having been left behind. She caught him up and carried him into the drawing-room, switching off the lights until only a low one, in the far corner, burned subduedly, under its deep-pink shade. She wanted to be alone, not subject even to Mrs. Jamison's good-night, nor Lizette's knock. Her nerves were tingling, her brain thrumming. She lay back in a deep arm-chair, in the shadow of the chimney-place; eyes closed, inert and listless. Chum curled around on her lap, kissed her hand softly, then put his little head upon it, and slept. Presently the relaxed position, the quiet, and the closed eyes had their effect upon Mildred; she, too, slept.

Suddenly the dog's black eyes opened, looking straight at the side-window, nearby.

"Ur-r-r!" he growled, faintly; "Ur-r-r!"

It awoke Mildred.

"What is it, Chum?" she asked.

The little fellow sat up sharply, eyes on the window, ears cocked.

"Ur-r-r-r!" he answered. "Ur-r-r-r-r!"

"What is outside that you don't like?"

The next instant, there was the scrape of a foot on gravel, and she caught the dog around the nose, just in time to prevent a bark.

"Be quiet, sir!" she whispered.

Putting him on the chair, she went softly to the window. The shade was drawn, but on the side it did not lie quite tight to the sash; just the barest space through which one could look, and not be seen. Chum would not have growled at one of the servants; so, who was it, and why on that side of the house, which was remotest from the kitchen? She cautiously drew the curtain, and put her eye to the crack—then almost cried out in surprise.

Just outside stood Henry Landor—even in the semi-darkness she recognized him instantly. What was he doing there! At that moment, he put his head close to the glass and peered up at the juncture of the two sash—and then she understood: he was examining the window and its fastenings. Presently, he stepped back, gave a quick glance around, and disappeared toward the front of the house. She stole over to the piazza window. The shade was raised just a trifle; she lay flat on the floor and looked out.

Landor was drawing himself carefully up on the piazza; he slunk across and stood in front of this

window, so close that she could see only his feet; but she knew that he was examining it also. Almost immediately, he moved away, dropped lightly to the turf, and vanished in the shadows of the trees toward the avenue.

Mildred arose, and returned to her chair.

"Chum!" she said, picking him up and nestling his small head close to her cheek, "you are a dear! to tell me that some one was out there, and then to keep so still while I watched him. . . . . We are going to have a burglar, to-night, boy—not a professional burglar; an amateur, who wants the Highland snuff-box in the cabinet yonder. But we will block him, you and I. You have done your part, the rest is for your mistress."

For a time, she thought over various ways of procedure, while Chum slept again on her knee. Should she summon *the* policeman? (the entire force that looked after the safety of Egerton, at night)—should she telephone for Judge Casson?—for Harwood?—station Brown in the drawing-room? . . . .

One after another, she put them aside; and for the same objection:—were Landor taken, or even recognized, he could clear himself only by explaining his motives; which would involve her, and likely prove her undoing—at least, it would raise a scandal which would be hard to down. Indeed, instead of employing the butler, she must see to it that neither he, nor any of the servants, came upon Landor

during the burglary. For she intended that he be permitted to make the attempt, and then be caught in the act; notwithstanding, as she realized now, it was she herself who must do the catching—and do it alone.

The clock on the landing began to strike ten. She tucked Chum under her arm, and went upstairs. Landor would not return before one at the earliest, more likely two; and there was no occasion for Brown to find her there, when he came front to close the house.

She stopped for a good-night word with Mrs. Jamison. She put in an hour, after Lizette had removed the evening-gown, in having her brush the soft red hair, and weave it into a heavy plait. But when the maid would have apparelled her for the night, she dismissed her, telling her to go to bed, and that she would undress without assistance. She slipped on a shimmering blue silk tea-gown, and settled, with a magazine, into a easy chair beside the reading-light. Immediately, however, she got up and went into the bed-room; returning with a long-barrelled military revolver, which she put on the table, beside her; first assuring that no cartridge lay under the hammer. Then she resumed her magazine.

At the half-hour bell, after midnight, she raised the sash and looked over at Fairlawn—her rooms being on the south side of The Oaks she could not see the Hall, except by leaning well out of the front

window. Lights still burned there, so she returned to her reading.

At one o'clock she looked again. Darkness now. Chum, curled in an Astor chair, was watching her with sleepy eyes. She hesitated. Was it better to leave him here, trusting that he would not hear the burglary, or to take him down with her and risk being able to control him to silence. She chose the former.

"You wait, boy," she said; "lie still, and be quiet—be quiet, sir!"

Chum put down his head, and blinked. Mildred wound her soft skirts around her, high above the slender, blue silk ankles, and, catching up the revolver, fingers around hammer and cylinder, she turned off the lights, stole softly across the hall, and down the stairs. She had never been afraid of the dark.

In the drawing-room, she went first to the side window and looked out, very cautiously. The sky was overcast, but the distant glow of the lamps on the avenue enabled her to see that no one was nearby. She did not venture to raise the shade, but she drew it back at the side enough to admit her hand to the catch. This she set at the extreme edge, where the least pressure would spring it open. She would have unlocked it, but that it might make Landor suspicious. She had no mind to lose the advantage, as well as the sweet pleasure, of catching him in the very act of burglary.

She went into the hall and listened—no sound, save the tick of the big clock on the landing. She counted two hundred—silence, still. She returned to the drawing-room, verified the exact position of the electric keys on the wall beside the door, then sat down on the sofa close-by, to wait.

To wait, is always tedious; to wait in darkness, is to treble tediousness and time; to wait alone, in darkness, for a burglar, in order to surprise him *after* he has broken in, is to treble every sensation within the range of nerves. Mildred, unafraid while she was moving about, now soon began to feel the rack of the suspense and the silence! She bent her ears toward the window, listening, hoping.

Presently, a big bell down in the town boomed once—its elder brother, in the court-house tower, echoed harshly—the soft chime of the ancient aristocrat, on the landing, spoke last.—Again, all was still.—If only she had brought the little dog; something alive to touch and whisper to!—She crossed cautiously to the window. Silence—no one there. She went back to the sofa. In a little while, she dozed.

She awoke, knowing that a noise outside had roused her. She lay quite still; Landor had come. Soon there was a scraping at the window, followed almost directly by the snap of the catch.

Instantly, she was up and behind the heavy hanging of the hall doorway, with the electric keys, in the drawing-room, under her hand.

She heard the sash moved cautiously; the shade was raised very slowly;—and, though she had distinguished no further sound, she was conscious of some one being in the room.

It was then, that the peril of it gripped her—even though it were Landor, and hence no danger. The chills of fear began to creep along her spine, colder and colder; only by clenching her teeth with all her strength was she able to restrain their chattering. She wanted to flee—upstairs!—anywhere! —only to get away! There came a sound from near the middle of the room. It was for that she waited,—to let him get well away from the window —yet, now, she had no power to act.

Suddenly, she felt the revolver in her hand. The fright left her as abruptly as it had come. She drew aside the curtain, and pressed the keys. The room burst into brilliant light.

"Good morning, Mr. Lan——!"

It was the be-whiskered face of an unknown, that was staring at her across the long, dull-blue barrel! In sheer amazement, she stared back. The tramp recovered first.

"Great Theodore!" he exclaimed, and sprang toward the window.

"Stop!" Mildred snapped.

The man stopped. He knew something of revolvers; and the woman, who used one of military size, doubtless could shoot straight.

"Face around!" she ordered.—"Now, where is

the man who employed you to break in here?—Come, no trifling; one kills burglars, and I'll do it, if you don't answer. Where is he, I say?—Speak low, I don't want the house aroused."

"I pass, leddy!—he was out there when I come in, but you can bet your last nickle, he cut when you put on the juice."

"What is his name?"

"He's the bloke what owns the big, hot bun of a house with the wall around it—next to this her'n."

"How do you know he is the man who owns it?"

"Well, that's what he tells me," said the tramp quickly—he did not like the sudden narrowing of Mildred's eyes.

"Can you describe him?" she asked.

"Sure!—big; up, not through; black hair, the sort you, leddy, would call handsome."

"What did he tell you to get here?"

"A silver somethin' in the glass cupboard, there; with a pink stone in the top."

"What were you to do with it?"

"Bring it to him at the window; he wanted to get his peeps on her a minute."

"And then?"

"Then I was to chuck her back in the cupboard, just where I got her."

"How were you to open the cabinet?"

"Oh, I wouldn't had no trouble in that line, leddy," tipping her a wink; "a bit of wire does the trick, see!—anyway, he gave me some keys."

Mildred nodded. "What did he pay you?"

"Twenty-five piasters—five down, balance when the job was pulled off."

"I suppose he picked you up somewhere this evening, for the job?" she asked.

"Right, leddy!—on the road near your gate—he'd just come out. He said it were on a bet—a friendly burglary, he called it.—Is that all, mam? I'm 'most bias-eyed lookin' down the mouth of that cannon you keep trained on me diamond stud."

Mildred smiled. "Yes—that is all;—only, don't try to collect the balance of the piasters, and don't loiter around Egerton; get away before day-break, and stay away. If you do, you will miss the penitentiary—for this time, at least. If you don't——"

"Me for the grit, leddy, on the jump."

With a sweeping bow, the soldier of the Imperial Guard backed to the window, and stepped out into the night.

Mildred closed the sash, and lowered the curtain. Then she took the snuff-box from the cabinet, turned off the lights, and passed wearily up the stairs to her room.

XIII

AROUND THE LOOP BY THE SUGAR-LOAF

"COLLETON," said Evelyn Leicester, slipping her hand through his arm, "come along out into Betty's garden, I want a little chat with you."

"If it is to be only a *little* chat, I won't go."

"That's up to you—and how long you can delay your visit to The Oaks."

"What gives you the notion I might wander over there?" he laughed.

"To wander implies aimlessness," she retorted, dropping his arm, and gathering her skirts for the stone steps.

"Whither away, O Fair Maid of the Pretty Ankles?" called Wilberforce, from the billiard-room window.

"Where people won't see what they shouldn't," she answered.

"So long, little one!" he called. "I'll wait for your return; don't overstay my patience!"

"Now, you know," she said, as they went down among the flowers, "had any one else done that, I should have been furious. It's queer how some men can say almost anything to a woman and yet not be offensive."

"Have you ever noticed, however, that such men can never do anything that really counts?"

She looked up at him thoughtfully.

"I hadn't noticed it," she replied, "but you are right. No one ever gets angry at Tony—and no one would think of him as anything but just a good fellow."

"Exactly—a handy chap to have around—up on social niceties, good at cards and amateur sports, clever at leading a cotillon—— Well, I seem to be characterizing myself rather accurately! Would you have been furious with *me* had I spoken as Wilberforce did?"

"No——"

He raised his hands expressively.

"*You* are privileged to speak to me anyway you wish," she ended.

"I've never done anything that counts!" he argued.

"Indolence and a fortune, not capability. Come over to the bench by the rose tree, and quit fishing or pessimism, whichever it be. Moreover, you will do something that counts if you stay at Fairlawn and live up to your obligations—and don't start wrong." She sat down.

"It was just here that I first saw Mrs. Gascoyne," he answered.

"Then *she* didn't start wrong—she understands the power of scenic effect."

"She made a rather striking picture, I admit—her wonderful hair, and the roses, and the vines, and all that, you know."

"Yes, I know—and she made a still more striking picture beside me in the drawing-room, the other evening, didn't she? You've an eye to scenic effect, yourself."

"I should like to see her beside you here," he replied, stepping back as in contemplation; "the black and the red, against the roses and the——"

"Oh, go 'long, Colleton! Come here beside me, yourself, and I'll tell you something that may interest you."

He sat down, and gave her hand an affectionate little tap.

"Good girl!" he said; "what is it?"

"Now, I've a mind not to tell you."

"*No,* you haven't! Your curiosity would not permit. You want to know something from me, as well as to tell me something."

"Positively, you are growing astute!" she laughed, "though this time you are misjudging me. I plead curiosity, but I'm not counting on you satisfying it. Can you tell me what Henry Landor was doing in this garden, at two o'clock this morning?"

"I haven't the remotest notion," said Harwood; —"maybe he was walking down a troubled conscience."

"Then, maybe it also was a troubled conscience which, a short while after, turned on the lights in The Oaks."

Harwood smiled.

"And maybe it was the same troubled conscience

which, a few minutes later, brought Landor up through the garden on a run!"

"And the lights in The Oaks?" he asked.

"They were extinguished almost immediately after."

"And you would connect the lights with Landor?"

"No, no, Colleton!" with a bantering smile, "I leave the inference to you; I am only narrating a sequence of events."

He broke off a rose, and slowly plucked it to pieces. After last evening, the sequence of events led very straight to one conclusion. Yet, surely, Landor would not attempt to enter The Oaks—commit a felony to see a snuff-box, on the mere chance of it establishing Mrs. Gascoyne's identity. If it were true, then the matter was at a crisis where he was justified in insisting that she permit him to aid her. Now, however, he must make a play at ridiculing Evelyn's suspicions.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "When Landor went out, he had the conscience; when he returned, he was running away from it."

"And the light in The Oaks?" she queried, very sweetly.

"The solemn-faced butler chasing a mouse!"

"Why not conducting morning prayers?" she mocked.

"Too early!"

"It is all very well, my boy, for you to deride

and be silly, but I rather suspect it is assumed. However, I forbid your mentioning it to Landor. For the present, I prefer to keep it for my own use. There he comes now, on the side path; I think I'll stop him. . . . . Good morning!" (flashing him her most enticing smile) "come and take the busy host's place; he has been trying to get away for the last ten minutes. Run along, Colleton, I'll excuse you, now."

"Don't be flattered, Landor," said Harwood; "you will be dismissed as soon as the next chap appears," and with a sly wink at Evelyn, he strolled off toward the house.

Here, he stopped long enough to glance over his mail, and to give William the special orders for the day.

"Is there a car in front?" he asked.

"Yes, sir—the little one that came yesterday; Mr. Wilberforce and some of the folks took the big one."

Harwood nodded, and went out, dismissed Hudson and drove to The Oaks. As he turned into the driveway, Mrs. Gascoyne was standing at an open window, and he swung his cap in greeting.

She came out on the piazza to meet him.

"I captured you that time!" he laughed, jumping out and taking her hand. "Come with me for a ride; it's too glorious a morning to stay indoors."

She tried to look him in the eyes, and failed.

"I'm too busy!" she said.

"Busy! Nonsense! You are not too busy to spare an hour for health. Dressmakers and fighting dirt kill more women than disease." He drew her toward the door. "Run along, milady; tie on your puffs with a bolt or two of veil, and we'll be off—hustle!"

"I oughtn't to go!" she protested, "really, I oughtn't!"

"I'll give you five minutes," handing her into the hall. "Run along!—and, I say, dear, leave a strand or two of hair outside the veil."

"Why?" she asked, in puzzled surprise.

He stepped in beside her, and bent his head near to hers.

"So that the wind will brush it against my face," he whispered.

She looked up at him with a mischievous smile.

"You forget the size of the hat, m'sieur!" and sprang away. "I'll be down in a minute!" she called, from the landing.

When she came, Harwood shook his head sadly.

"I never saw such fool hats," he said.

"Nor I!" she laughed; "but deliverance is in sight; they won't dare make them wider—they are elevator-door size now."

"Which way will the brims turn, up or down?" he asked, putting her in, and drawing on his gloves.

"Both! it will be waste-paper baskets, next."

"Oh, Lord! me for the mantilla."

The car dipped out on the avenue, and he swung

it for the long loop by the Sugar-Loaf. "Did you ever wear a mantilla?" he asked suddenly, leaning forward to see past her veil.—"Ah, it *was* you!—do you remember?"

"Perfectly, m'sieur: the Grand Canal of Venice. I recognized you, at once, in the Fairlawn garden."

"Was it the mantilla that deceived me—led me to think your hair was black?"

"Possibly!—though it was bright sun-light; and my hair was red, I assure you; quite as red as now."

"I haunted the hotels and Florian's for days, in search of you."

"I wasn't at a hotel; I was staying with friends. I went to Rome that very evening."

"Two years wasted! Why didn't you leave a note for me?—you should have known I'd try to find you."

"You great stupid!" she laughed gayly; "where should I have sent the note, and to whom: 'The Man Whose Clumsy Gondolier almost tumbled Me into the Adriatic,—Some Hotel,—Venice?' Moreover, sir, why should I have wanted you to find me—why should I have even thought of you again!"

Harwood loved the little toss of her head, and the half-indignant flash of the long-lashed eyes.

"I don't know why," he said, placidly; "but you have."

"I suppose you will have the effrontery to say that I told you!"

"Practically that, little one:—you did not forget

me—you recognized me immediately—and you denied me, when I put you to the test."

"Put me to the test, indeed!" she mocked. "When, Mr. Harwood, when?"

"The afternoon you gave me a high-ball instead of tea. You told me, then, that you had been to Venice only once, last year."

"That wasn't the way of it. You asked if I had been in Venice;—I said, 'only once last year'; you replied, 'it was two years ago,' but you did not follow it by asking, if I were there *two years ago.*"

"Rather fine-spun salvation, milady! Why did you deliberately mislead me?"

"I didn't! I only refused to help you. If you couldn't recognize me, I most certainly did not intend to let you think that I remembered you."

A man in uniform stepped out on the track ahead, and waved his stick for them to stop.

"You're running too fast, Mr. Harwood," he said.

"Too fast!" Colleton marvelled, glancing at the speedometer, "I was doing not quite a twelve."

The guard smiled. "Six is the limit, sir."

"*Six the limit!* Is this entire battle-field a cemetery?"

"There are many who think so, sir; but the Boss says, the public must be protected, if he has to cut this limit in half—and then some. I didn't mean to hold you up—only to remind you of the rule. Go right along, sir."

"It was really my fault, Carson," said Mrs. Gascoyne; "Mr. Harwood did not see the notice, and I forgot to tell him."

"Very decent sort, that officer," said Colleton.

"They all are—they never make an arrest unless driven to it."

"Good! where is the next guard stationed?—we will hit it up a bit, as soon as we pass the curve. In the meantime, tell me what you did, last evening."

"Nothing."

"Of course! but what else?"

"Had Judge Casson for dinner, and professional consultation. He is one dear old man."

"Yes," said Harwood, "he is. What did you do after he left?"

She gave him a quick, sidelong glance: "Sat in the drawing-room until something after ten, then went upstairs."

"And then?"

"*M'sieur!! you* stop downstairs."

"I did!" he laughed. "I meant, when you came down, again!"

"Oh, this morning?"

He closed the throttle, and, one hand on the steering-wheel, faced around toward her.

"Yes, this morning!—at two o'clock.—Tell me about it, dear;"—slipping his hand over hers—"was he after the snuff-box?"

"How did you know of it?"

"I guessed it. He was seen in the garden of

Fairlawn, at two o'clock; presently, the lights went on suddenly at The Oaks; a minute later, he ran up through the garden from the rear."

"I'll tell you, certainly, if you wish," she said. "On the whole, it is rather amusing." . . . .

"It is a good story, and may seem amusing now," said Harwood, when she had concluded, "but it isn't amusing to me, dear. That fellow is bent on mischief; won't you let me pack him off?"

She shook her head. "He wouldn't go farther than Egerton."

"The police should see that he went."

"No! no!" she exclaimed; "that would ruin everything. Do you really want to help me, dear? —yes, I know you do. Then keep him at Fairlawn; treat him just as heretofore; don't let him have a suspicion of what you know—and let me fight it out alone."

"Don't make me stand idle! let me *do* something."

"If it were the days of chivalry, I should let you kill him."

"And I should do it gladly.—I'll do it now, if he will provide a half-justifiable excuse."

She grasped his hand with both of hers.

"Heavens, Colleton, I didn't mean it!" she cried.

"I know you didn't, sweetheart," he said, slipping his arm around her; "nevertheless, there is no reason why you should not pray that he break his neck on the run to-morrow."

"It is a shameful thing to say, I know, but if he were to go down, I should shout for joy, as I rode by." She looked up at him with a wan, little smile. "Are you very much shocked, m'sieur?"

"So much so, that if you permit, I will ride over him at one of the fences."

"Indeed, I don't permit!" she exclaimed. "On the contrary, any violence to Landor from *you*, is specifically prohibited.—And listen, Colleton! you must not take my hand, nor put your arm around me, nor call me 'dear,' and 'sweetheart.' It isn't seemly for you to do, nor for me to permit; and you must help me, Colleton—you must help me to do right."

"Why is it not seemly?" he asked, gently.

"Because—because—we can never be more than friends."

"Even granting that, which I most assuredly do not, still, is it any reason whatever?" he asked. "Moreover, that reason does not exist; you will be Mistress of Fairlawn, before its roses fade."

"Don't!" she plead, "don't mock me with the impossible and hopeless!"

"My dear little girl," he said, turning her fair face toward his, "dismiss such foolish notions. Think of the pleasant things; of the garden you delight in—all yours, to do with as you wish; of the house; of the happy years we shall have together. Nothing is impossible and hopeless to youth, and strength, and love."

"Shall I tell you why it is impossible and hopeless?" she asked, looking at him through tear-dimmed eyes.

"Do you really wish to tell me?"

She shook her head. "No! at least, not now."

"Then don't! Only, may I know whether Landor's coming has affected your decision?"

"Not in the least, Colleton. It would be just the same had he never seen this town."

"I'm glad," he answered; "now, I may be able to treat him as a host should, until you wish him sent. Then, I'll have William kick him off the piazza. The bounder should never have been included in the party. Hilda Gordon wanted him—I fancy there is an understanding between them."

"You mean that they are engaged?"

"It has not been announced, but that is the general impression."

"Has Miss Gordon money?"

"Any quantity of it. Her father was a marvellous financier. He was an executive officer of the Transportation Company; with a salary of much less than ten thousand a year, he was spending fifty thousand a year, and has left an estate of five million. She is the sole heir, and half of it is within her absolute control."

"And Landor, what of him, since he came to Northumberland?" she asked.

She listened, without interrupting, eyes fixed on the track ahead.

"Now!" she said; "with what happened last night, and what you've told me, I think I am pretty well prepared for Mr. Landor, so let us forget him for the rest of our ride."

Harwood had shut off the power, and they were coasting slowly down the steep and winding hill toward the Sugar-Loaf. He leaned on the wheel, and looked up at her. In the morning sun, the little wisps of hair that had come free, fluttered around her face like filaments of flame; the merry grey eyes sparkled through the glistening black lashes; the soft pink of her cheeks glowed deeper; the bright carmine of the lips went brighter still, the——

He resisted no more. Instead, he caught her quickly to him, and kissed her on the cheek, and lips, and eyes.

"Colleton!" she cried. "You nasty—! What if some one saw!"

"No one saw!" he laughed. "There isn't even a bird in sight."

"You have knocked my hat loose—every pin in my hair is sticking me!"

"Let me fix it!"

"Keep away!" swinging her elbow between them, "you've done quite enough damage. Why didn't you wait until—I mean—oh, I hate you!"

"I kissed you only twice!" he protested.

"Only twice!—*Can't* you see this front hat-pin! Why don't you *help* me?"

He searched for it, awkwardly.

"Here it is!" he cried; "what shall I do with it?"

"Pull it out, stupid! pull it out.—Ah! thank you—no, I'll not thank you; it's all your fault."

"I'm sorry, dear; you're quite right, I should have waited until you had taken off the hat."

She turned her back on him.

"Or did you mean until we got to The Oaks?" he teased.

With that, she whirled around and jabbed one of the pins into his arm.

"Great Hell!" he exclaimed.—"I beg your pardon!"

"Did you know what you were saying, Mr. Harwood?" she asked, sweetly.

"No!—did you know what you were *doing?*"

"Perfectly!—just as, when you kissed me, you knew what you were doing, and I didn't know what I said."

"Then the penalty for two kisses is an inch of hat-pin in some handy part of my anatomy.—Come along, while you have that javelin in your hand, jab it into the other arm, and I'll take my exchange at the end of the ride."

"Positively, Colleton, you are incorrigible."

"Yes, dear!"

"You admit it?"

"Yes, dear."

"Expecting a reward for truthfulness, I suppose.

Well, I don't doubt it needs encouragement; so, if you will promise to be good——"

"How long?"

"Always."

"No, dear."

"To the end of the ride?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then you may come over this afternoon, and I'll give you——"

"Go on, dear."

"A cup of tea."

"It's a bargain!" he said, instantly, declining to be teased.—"This isn't your day at home?"

"No; but I'll have some others in, if you wish," she smiled.

"It won't be necessary, thank you; I intend to drink all the tea, myself."

They were crossing the thicket-covered, boulder-strewn swamp, through which an arrogant and blundering (was he also vindictive and jealous?) cavalry commander had sent his dashing rival to lead a charge, more hopeless and shamefully needless than Cardigan rode at Balaklava. A little further on, they skirted the edge of the Sugar-Loaf, passed around it to the north, and swung up the sharp acclivity to the bald knob of the Baby-Loaf, hanging high above the valley of Bloody Run.

Harwood gave an exclamation of astonishment, and stopped the machine.

"What a picture—what a prospect!" he ex-

claimed, looking for the first time upon the whole western half of the county, rolling in wave after wave of field and forest to the blue buttress of the distant mountains.

"It is magnificent!" he cried, "simply magnificent! It is far superior to much that is famous abroad. Don't you think so, Mildred?"

"I do, indeed!" she answered. "And you must see a sunset, from here—with the mountain tips on fire, and the whole heavens blazing with such iridescent glory, as I have not seen excelled anywhere on earth."

"You shall bring me here, some evening," he answered. . . . . "What is the crowd of carriages near the big bronze statue?"

"Tourists. Drive up close; I want you to hear the guide; sometimes they are very amusing."

The guide was a small man, with a sonorous voice, and a luxuriance of elocution. He was telling his story just as he had told it hundreds of times; the same inflections, the same extravagant gestures, the same oratorical pauses for climax.

"And so it was, my friends," he was thundering, sweeping his arm aloft, "that, at the end of this great and bloody struggle, where the chivalry of the North, under the immortal Meade, met the chivalry of the South, under the immortal Lee, there lay——"

"Who was it you say commanded the Rebs?" one of the tourists sang out.

"Lee, sir, General Robert E. Lee!"—He swept his arm aloft. "And so it was, my friends, that, at the end of this great and bloody struggle, where the chivalry of the North, under the immortal Meade, met the chivalry of the South, under the immortal Lee, there lay upon this battle-field, bathed in the soft and silvery rays of the gentle moon——"

"Aren't you mistaken about the moon?" another tourist broke in. "I was here, and I don't remember any moon."

From his rock pulpit, the guide looked down with condescending eye.

"No, sir, my friend," he said, grandiloquently; "the official records of the War Department, at Washington, D. C., specially mention the moon."—He swept his arm aloft. "And so it was, my friends, that, at the end of this great and bloody struggle, when the chivalry of the North, under the immortal Meade, met the chivalry of the South, under the immortal Lee, there lay upon this battle-field, bathed in the soft and silvery rays of the gentle moon, the bodies of ten thousand dead men, and one dead *lady!*"

Harwood's mirth burst forth, and he shot the car ahead.

"I must get away, before he goes back and kills that poor woman, again. And is he the typical battle-field guide?"

"Oh, no! he is one of the best of them. . . . . There,"—pointing ahead to the cross-roads near

the foot of the hill, where a man was soliciting a group, that had just alighted from a trolley car—"is one of another sort."

Harwood slowed down, and stopped close by. Even from afar, the fellow's features and speech had proclaimed his descent. His old horses, sore in front, hide-bound and ungroomed, were hitched to the dirty, dilapidated surrey, with harness that had never seen either oil or soap; indeed, soap was not specially in evidence with the man himself. The people he was trying to catch, were excursionists,—not tourists—and of the class which always do everything cheap.

"I vill dakes you all ofer the pattle-field for fefty cents," he argued.

"What do you know about the battle?" some one asked.

"Vot do I know! I know ev'ry dinks; I vas lifin' in Meat's het-quarders ven de pattle vas."

A Park guard came up the avenue. The excursionist stopped him.

"Officer," he said, "this man wants to take us over the field; he declares he knows all about it, that he lived in Meade's headquarters during the battle. Do you know if it's true?"

A broad grin over-spread the guard's kindly face.

"Him!" he exclaimed, pointing his stick at the guide, "him!—lived in General Meade's headquarters!—why, stranger, that fellow was still in Jerusalem, when the battle was fought."

"Are we likely to meet others of these entertaining gentlemen?" Harwood asked, as, no guard in sight, they sped along toward town.

"Plenty of them—everywhere; it has long been a recognized vocation in Egerton."

"What of this one?" as they approached a group of carriages, near a great, bronze figure of an open book. "Is there another laugh here?"

"No—this man knows his business; I have had him myself, and there are no dramatics nor repetitions with him."

"Good! He is the chap to coach me a bit on the battle. Since I am to be an Egertonian, it is my duty to know something of her great event.—We *are* going to live at Fairlawn, aren't we, sweetheart?"

She smiled up at him, with loving eyes.

"Yes, Colleton," she said softly, "in sweet fancy, I shall live at Fairlawn, until the real mistress comes."

"And then you will live there, *in fact*," he added, lightly, as though it were already settled, and abruptly changed the talk.

They ran slowly through the town, and out across the flat toward the ridge.

"Why, on earth!" he exclaimed, "are all these new residences built on this flat, between the railroad and a stagnant water course, and under a high west ridge—cold and damp in winter, hot and humid and dirty in summer."

"There is a standing reward, in town, for the answer!" she laughed, as the car drew up at The Oaks. "Judge Casson says, it's a case of geese: one led, the others followed."

"Five o'clock?" he asked, as he handed her out.

She nodded.

"And you won't wear a hat?"

"No."

"Nor a veil?"

"No!"

"And you won't be at home to anyone else?"

"No!" hesitatingly.

"Mildred, you're a dear!—good-by!"

"And, Colleton——"

He paused, hand on throttle.

"We will have tea indoors, instead of on the lawn." And before he could answer she was gone.

He drove on to Fairlawn. Wilberforce was standing in the doorway.

"Been for a ride?" he remarked.

Harwood nodded.

"Diana, too, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful view from the edge of the Baby-Loaf—particularly with a glass."

Harwood looked at him sharply.

"Just so, old man," said Tony. "Next time you kiss your pretty neighbor, get under cover. However, be easy; I had the glass, and I'll not tell."

XIV

THE ULTIMATUM

Evelyn Leicester had an amusing, yet, for her purpose, a very unprofitable half hour with Landor, after Harwood left them. She found him ready enough to gossip and flirt, and to be confidential about commonplaces, but whenever she tried to lead toward Mrs. Gascoyne, he adroitly veered off. It was, of course, further confirmation of her suspicions regarding them, but on that score she was already sufficiently convinced. So she gave over, for the time, and took him back to the house. She was not ready to use the incident of the prior night, nor even to let him know of her suspicion.

Landor did not remain at the Hall, however; he returned immediately to the garden, and passing out by the postern gate he went through the grove, in the rear, to the road on its farther side. Following it around to the left brought him on the path to the town, at the corner beyond The Oaks. He had a faint hope that the tramp would be somewhere there, waiting for a chance to collect the other five-spots. And he was very ready to pay them for a little information.

He had fled from the window, the instant the light went on, never doubting that the other would do likewise. Instead, when he had regained his

room (sneaking into the house by the basement door, which he had used for exit) the lights still burned in the Gascoyne drawing-room. Remembering that a field-glass, he had been using that day, lay on his dressing-table, he had focused it just in time to see the tramp bow to Mrs. Gascoyne and then drop from the window. What did it mean? —Why had he lingered?—had he confessed, or had he simply been pleading off? He had been about to venture out in pursuit, when the noise of some one moving about in the hall, deterred him.

But, now, the soldier of the Imperial Guard was not in the grove, waiting for his five-spots, nor was he on the road; so Landor went on to the town. Here, he spent the rest of the morning wandering through the back streets, then through the main ones, searching everywhere,—and vainly. And all the while, there went with him the problem, how to handle the matter, if Mrs. Gascoyne had forced his burglar to confess.

On his way back to Fairlawn, the glittering show-window of a jewelry shop caught his eyes.

"Huh! I am stupid!" he muttered, stopping, and looking it over.

From its location and general appearance, it likely was the principal one of the town. He went in.

"Was it here," he asked the young man at the work table, behind the counter, "that Mrs. Gascoyne left the silver snuff-box, this morning?"

"Yes, sir; but I'm sorry it isn't finished," said the clerk, who had recognized Landor as one of the Fairlawn guests. "Did you wish to take it along out to her?"

"Yes; I know she wants it this afternoon, and as I'm going by The Oaks, I thought to save her the trouble of sending for it." He turned away, then stopped. "Will it be much work to remove the scratches?" he asked.

"Oh, no, sir—I shall have the box ready by two o'clock, for when I promised it."

"Let me see it, a moment, please!" said Landor.

"It's a queer old thing, sure enough!" taking the box from a drawer in his table, and passing it across the case. "I never saw a Scotch-pebble, before. Are there really such pebbles over there—picked up any old place?"

"I confess I don't know," Landor answered, opening the lid and examining the under side; "but they are rather handsome for anyone's finding, don't you think?"

"Rather! I'd like to tumble upon a hundred or two of them!" the clerk laughed.

Landor smiled—but not with the clerk. The marks were in the lid, as he had remembered—as he himself had scratched them there, with the point of a knife-blade, one evening, long ago.

"They are not deep; you can rub them out quite easily," he said, returning the box. "Thank you! and you don't need to mention to Mrs. Gascoyne

that I tried to take it out to her; a courtesy attempted but not executed, you know,"—with easy confidentialness—" is often misunderstood."

" Mum's the word, sir!" said the clerk, with a sly wink; " I understand."

Having no idea what the clerk understood, but with complacent satisfaction, Landor went back to Fairlawn. The tramp was eliminated; he had no further need for him. It mattered little, now, even if Mrs. Gascoyne had learned the truth as to last night's raid. The snuff-box clinched the identification. He would pay her a little visit, that afternoon.

At the Hall, a wire awaited him, from his office in Northumberland:

" Firm telegraphs for particulars of Hampton Bonds, date of draft, number, drawer and drawee Banks. No entries on books. Can't find any memoranda. National says draft not by it. What answer for Firm?"

He went to the table in the library, and drew over the pad of yellow blanks for answer; then sat frowning and narrow-eyed, in thought.

They were closing in on him. Unless he could lull their suspicion, they were sure to send immediately some one to Northumberland to investigate, and the facts would be quickly uncovered. After that, the police. . . . .

He needed several days—the rest of the week at least—to work out his salvation. Mrs. Gascoyne was not likely to yield to-day, nor even to-morrow, maybe. Furthermore, he foresaw difficulty in secur-

ing an interview; there was very small possibility that she would be at home to him; so it was to catch her on the wing or unawares.

Above all, must he avoid the appearance of haste. She was sure to assume he was after money, but let her get the idea that he was pressed for it, and she would hold out to the last moment. And then, there was the chance,—remote, to be sure, yet possible—that she would laugh in his face, and bid him be gone and do his worst; in which event, he, in his haste, was remitted to the Gordon. Indeed, it might not be amiss to prepare her for an avowal; he would see to it, after luncheon.

The ink had dried on his pen; he dipped it in again, and wrote—to his own office, that he would reply to the Firm's inquiry.

That to the latter read:—

"Hampton's own draft endorsed to your order. No memoranda retained as to same. He won't be in town before Monday. Meanwhile, I am mailing to-day my check for proceeds. Return, if draft received first."

He read it over heedfully. If that did not win, nothing could win. Of course, he had not the balance in the National to meet the check, but that would not develop until it went through for collection; which, from New York, would not be before Monday—and much to his luck, the National absolutely refused to give any information concerning a check, or other commercial paper drawn on it, until the instrument was duly presented for pay-

ment across the counter, or through the Clearing-House. Even if the Firm were to forward the check direct to the National for collection, with instructions to wire if paid, they could not hear before noon, Saturday, which with the half holiday, was little better than Monday—and by Monday, he should have the cash to meet it.

He took a blank check from his pocket book, drew it for the full amount due the Firm, and, inclosing with it a note confirming the wire, tossed the envelope into the mail basket. Then he sealed the two messages in another envelope, and rang for the butler.

A step sounded in the hall, and stopped in the doorway behind him.

"Here, William," he said, holding out the envelope, and without looking around, "send this to the telegraph office, at once—give the change to the boy."

"What is there about me that suggests the butler?" asked Miss Gordon.

"Hello, Hilda!" he exclaimed, jumping up, and going over to her, "I was just thinking of you."

"And calling me William! sometimes, my dear boy, you are a disgracefully clumsy liar."

"Isn't that rather to my credit?"

"I said, *sometimes*," she retorted; "ordinarily, you are exceedingly clever at it—as becomes long practice."

"Lies and hypocrisy are the coin current of

society!" he smiled. "Truth and sincerity are the counterfeit and interdicted."

William entered, received the envelope, and announced luncheon.

"And was it with such coin," she demanded, "that you bought your way into *us?*"

"Is such coin your currency?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and raised her pretty eyebrows.

"Come on!" she said, laughing, "quit this cheap philosophy, and let us see what the Queen of Egypt has sent in. I plead a most unfeminine hunger."

But it was not Landor's purpose to be with her at table—his play called for a locale more sequestered than a crowd of jollying intimates. So he left her at the dining-room door, and went back to the library; waiting there until the places beside her were occupied.

He joined her immediately, however, when they arose.

"Go with me for a little stroll," he said; "I looked for you this morning, but you were off on a joy-ride with Wilberforce."

"Don't call it a joy-ride where Tony hears you!" she laughed. "Six miles an hour—stopped by five guards—threatened by two—ran by the last with a courteous remark about a locality of intense heat. Oh, it was delicious! I wished for you."

"I wished for myself, when I found I was left behind!"

"Why didn't you improve the morning by cultivating Evelyn Leicester?" she asked. "While the smile of her favor is upon you, better nail it fast, as Tony would say."

"I nailed!" he laughed. "For some reason I can't guess, she even displaced Harwood for me, when I chanced upon them in the garden—after you had run off with Wilberforce.—I wonder, is that going to be a match?"

"Never; it is idealized friendship—the genuine thing, too." Then she laughed. "Man-like, you have missed the real match that is coming."

"The real match!" he echoed. "Here—at Fairlawn?"

"Yes, here at Fairlawn."

"Mrs. Leicester?"

"No."

"Harwood?" he exclaimed.

She nodded.

He stared at her, incredulously.

"You're very blind!" she laughed—"it's been going on ever since we came here, though it doubtless started before then."

"I pass!" he said, throwing up his hands. "Which of you girls is it?"

"Which would you think?"

"I think no better than I see. I only know that I do not want it to be *you*."

She gave him a quick smile of favor.

"I believe you are actually serious—no, no, not

about *me!* about not really knowing. It is none of us.—It is Mrs. Gascoyne."

For a moment, Landor looked at her in blank amazement; then he smiled. It was preposterous, of course—with him here! Nevertheless, the mere idea might be of service.

"You astonish me," he said; "how did you get any such notion?"

"How does one usually get it?"

"Visually—inferentially—intuitively."

"Together with—in this particular case—propinquity and uncommon physical attractiveness," she added.

"And you think the sentiment is mutual; that she encourages him?"

"Because a woman admires a man, it does not follow that she encourages him."

"Nor the converse, either," he laughed; "but that does not answer my question."

"It is very evident she doesn't discourage him, isn't it?"

"Nor does it follow from that, that she encourages him."

"Don't be so literal. You know what I mean."

"Frankly, Hilda, I don't. Suppose you tell me."

"I'll do nothing of the sort; be satisfied with my prophecy. Moreover, you have seen, or could have seen quite as much as I."

"Oh, very well! I'm not especially interested in *others'* love affairs."

She looked intently at the tips of her pretty fingers.

"Only in my own," he appended.

"Are you in love?" she asked, raising her eyes suddenly to his, then dropping them quickly.

He pulled up sharply; this was going altogether too fast; he had no intention to be manœuvred into a proposal, to-day. He would make a quick, spectacular play, and then retreat.

"I don't know," he answered; "that is, I'm not sure; I'm afraid of myself."

She sent him another fleeting glance of timid encouragement.

"And so long as I am afraid of myself," he went on, "I have no right to speak of love to any one."

He looked down at her tenderly, hesitatingly; then shut his lips tight, threw back his shoulders determinedly, and gazed hard into the distance, as one struggling with sore temptation.

He would have been startled, indeed, had he seen the cold and questioning eyes that watched him; eyes that changed instantly, however, to warmth and trust, when he turned toward her; and she gave him her hand, as though she understood, and had full faith in the future. At the same time, she led—very tactfully, as it seemed to him—the talk from themselves, and matters purely personal; whither he was quite content to be led.

The situation had shaped itself exactly to his desire; she was trembling to give herself; a word,

and she was his. Indeed, his so completely that she would gladly supply the money; urge it on him, if he but casually intimated his need. And he should have afforded her the opportunity forthwith, save for the fact that it would lead to other complications later; which was not the case if he obtained it from Mrs. Gascoyne. At all events, he could face with equanimity now, the coming Monday and payment of the outstanding check.

They had gone out by the postern gate, and around, by the road and the avenue, to the front of Fairlawn. As they turned in, Wilberforce was coming down the steps.

"Shake along, you two!" he called; "we're off for another pilgrims' progress over a few more of these sanctified, six-miles-per speed-ways."

"Miss Gordon will go," said Landor; "I've some letters to write."

"Jostle yourself, then, Hilda! the rest are ready. —Better come and join your tears with ours, Landor; I understand that the tomb-stones and mausoleums, at this end of the line, are especially conspicuous examples of lugubriousness, not to mention lamentable taste, and misspent dollars— you won't come? well stay, then, and weep alone."

Tony's pilgrims' progress had swept the house almost bare of guests. Harwood, himself, was occupied with a bundle of letters and papers in the library, and did not look up as Landor stopped in the doorway. Down in the billiard-room, Talbot

Vanbrugh was occupying two chairs, and sleeping the sleep of exhaustion and boredom, resultant of the morbidly introspective and cerebrally vivisective fiction, of a particularly pharisaical and smug monthly magazine, which, with pages curled indignantly, lay on the floor, avoided even by the waste-basket. Rosalind Spottswood, the only other who had not gone in the car, was nowhere to be seen; so he chose a new novel from the table in the hall, and went up to his room.

He intended to take up with Mrs. Gascoyne, later in the afternoon, the matter of the snuff-box—whether he should also, at the same time, press on to the finality, assert unequivocally her identity, and demand the money, would depend upon her attitude. If she weakened over the box, he would proceed; but if she fought back with good-natured ridicule, as was likely, he would go just far enough for her to infer his purpose, and then let her have a night to consider the situation as affecting herself, if she refused to buy his silence. To-day, should be the final investment, and the summons to surrender; to-morrow, the assault along the entire line if the summons were declined.

His room was on the side of the Hall toward The Oaks; he drew a chair to the window, and fell to watching for Mrs. Gascoyne. Since the preliminary essential was an opportunity to speak with her alone, and the sure way was to surprise her where she could not escape, his hope was that she would

come out on the lawn under the trees; then he could go around to the rear entrance to The Oaks, and get between her and the house.

The afternoon marched slowly by his window toward the west. She was at home, he knew; he had caught a glimpse of her on an upper piazza, soon after he began the vigil. Five o'clock was her tea hour, which likely meant visitors from town. He waited until half-after-four; then he laid aside the book, passed a brush across his hair, whisked a bit of dust from his coat, and went briskly down to The Oaks. He must make the effort, despite its seeming hopelessness. At least, it would be a confession of fear, if she refused to see him.

It is rather disquieting, any time, to go to a house knowing that one is unwelcome; but to have to charge up to it by a long pathway, under the concentrated fire of a battery of windows, is distinctly unpleasant; and more especially so, if one anticipates being repulsed at the door, and obliged to retire under the fire of that same battery, now manned by grinning faces. And Landor felt distinct relief at the respite, which came when he reached the piazza, and laid hand on the bell.

With most commendable promptness, the droopy-eyed butler responded.

"Mrs. Gascoyne is at home," he said, presenting the silver tray when he saw that the visitor would use a card—and bowing him into the drawing-room.

Landor was so surprised, that, for a moment he

actually had stared at Brown, and fumbled in the wrong pocket for his card-case. He would have been surprised, even more, had he known that to only himself and Harwood was she at home—himself, if he came before five o'clock; Harwood, any time.

He went straight to the crystal cabinet—the snuff-box was there, down on the lowest shelf, half hidden by the little fan, and lying exactly as when he saw it yesterday.

The trail of a gown, in the hall, brought him quickly around and toward the door.

Mildred greeted him as though he were a welcome guest.

"It's very nice of you to come again, so soon," she said, giving him her hand, and motioning him to a chair, near the one she chose with the light behind her.

"I am delighted to come!" he smiled, meeting what he took to be sarcasm in her words, with the double meaning of his own.

"To see the snuff-box!" she laughed.—"Oh, I've not forgot!"—holding up the key—"there, go and look at it."

Had he not seen the box at the watchmaker's that morning, he might very well have been deceived by this ingenuous willingness. As it was, however, it simply recoiled upon her—it was so palpably a play.

"You mustn't think it was that, only, which

brought me," he replied lightly, as he went over to the cabinet.

She followed him with a frown.

"I'm vain enough to fancy you may have come to see me, too," she answered, but with no reflex of the frown showing in her tones.

"It isn't vanity to fancy the truth," he replied, taking out the box, and carrying it to the rear window.

She watched him curiously, as he examined it, turning it slowly, and flashing the light along the polished cone.

"May I open it?" he asked, looking up suddenly at her.

"Why surely!" with the inflection of surprise. "There isn't anything in it."

"I didn't imagine there would be," smiling blandly.

He turned back the lid and held it up to the window. It was as he thought:—free of scratch or mark. And the job was well done; even a cloud of tarnish had been spread over the silver, so that, to all appearances, it had not been touched for weeks, with so much as a cleaning cloth.

He came back and sat down, bringing the snuff-box with him.

"It is not a mate of the one I had in mind," he remarked.

"Yes?" she said with mild interest.

"In fact,"—leaning back and looking at her

through half-closed eyes, "it is the very one itself."

"Yes?" again, and with the same perfunctorily polite inflection.

"Pardon me! do I bore you?"

"Not at all," she smiled. "I should be glad to know something about the old trinket. I have often wondered where the Judsons got it, and whether it hasn't a history."

"Then the box is not yours?"

"Mine!" she inflected—"Oh! you don't understand, Mr. Landor. This is not my house; I rent it, furnished, from the Judsons, who are now in Europe. Do I look of those who buy gilt and glass cabinets?"

"No, you don't; but then, as some profound thinker remarked several years back—and a few others since—'looks are deceptive.' For instance: to look at the under side of this lid, one should never imagine, that a few hours ago it not only showed scarcely a trace of tarnish, but also had cut into it, as by the point of a knife, a date and a word in Greek."

"And continuing the 'for instance,'" she laughed, "one should never imagine, to look at you, that you were jesting."

It was altogether evident that the finality was not to be to-day. She had determined to withstand him, and threats would not move her now. It was, therefore, to show her the futility of denial, and then to wait until to-morrow.

"I'm not jesting," he said abruptly. "I saw this box at noon, at the shop in town where you left it, to have the marks on the lid removed. I had it in my hands, and the date and the Greek letters were there then—now, they are erased. Let me ask why, if it be the Judsons', you should have had this done?"

"My dear Mr. Landor, granting all that, I still seem to miss the point," she said.

He laughed gently, and, getting up, leaned his elbow on the mantle and looked down at her.

"My dear young woman," he said, "don't you think it is about time you cease this masquerade, at least with me?"

"What masquerade?" she asked, sweetly.

His answer was a shrug, and a lift of the eyebrows.

"And why cease it, at least with you?" she quoted.

Another shrug, and a tolerant smile.

"And what has the Judson snuff-box to do with it?"

"You know very well the point as to the snuff-box, and what it, and the inscription prove," he replied.

"Since I know, it will violate no confidence if you specify. What do they prove?"

"Your identity," he answered curtly. "But box aside, you surely must be demented to fancy that I should not recognize you. It seems absurd

that you could have hoodwinked me, even for a moment, notwithstanding the extraordinary change in your personal appearance—and your passing from girl to woman——"

She had been playing her part with an air of puzzled surprise. Now, perceiving that he still hesitated to declare the identity, she suddenly assumed the offensive.

"It is all very incoherent," she said; "but I infer that you are back to that fanciful resemblance you were raving about yesterday?"

"Your perspicacity is amazingly quick!" he remarked.

"And yours is amazingly slow," she replied. "I thought that I had disposed of your silly notion, and also had indicated that the subject was distasteful. I don't care for persistently disagreeable persons, so be good enough to talk of something else, or——"

"Thank you!" he laughed; "I'm going, in a moment. I intend to give you to-night to sleep over the matter—there can't be the least question as to your real identity; and, somehow, I am persuaded that you would be rather averse to having it proclaimed, here—to your new friends of Egerton, and *Fairlawn*. You understand?"

"Meaning that for a consideration you will not proclaim it?"

"Your wonderful perspicacity, again!" he answered.

"Yes, I understand!" she exclaimed. "You are just a common blackmailer; attempting to extort money because you take me for another over whom you hold some nasty secret." She crossed swiftly to the bell. "Will you go at once, or shall I have the grooms eject you?"

He smiled placidly.

"I shall expect your answer, not later than the hunt to-morrow," he said, and bowed himself out with exaggerated deference.

XV

THE ANSWER

Buzzard Hill lay several miles to the southeast of Egerton. Untamed and surly, it scowled across, at its pleasant-faced and courteous neighbor hill on the other side of Boulder Creek, steadily refusing to be either friendly or polite. It was aggressively inhospitable, and aggressively content to be. All the years that the neighbor had been submitting, complaisantly, to the ways of civilization, the Buzzard had resisted, strong in its inaccessibility, and a nature rough as its rocks, gnarled as its timber, and gloomy and sullen as the blackness of its pines. Those only, whom it received tolerantly, were preyers and scavengers, human, beast, and bird. From the last, it had its name.

To Egerton, Buzzard Hill implied the scum of things-living, wherein the natural order was reversed:—the best were animal, the worst, human. Let there be depredations in the outskirts of the town, the Hill was responsible; let there be carrion for birds, the Hill supplied them; let some foul-odored and greasy thing that bore man's debased image, go slouching along the streets, driving a limping, pain-racked, starving horse, in a wagon piled with bones and refuse, his destination was among the degenerates who consorted, somewhere, in the Hill.

Such was the Buzzard, as it touched the body-politic; and the latter had punished it with its name of disrepute. Yet, in truth, like many reputations, bad as well as good, based upon rank ignorance and inherited prejudice, it was little deserved and mainly false. The town judged it in the standards of the plain; therein, lay the injustice. The Buzzard was a topographic anomaly. It was, really, a lost spur of the mountain range, ten miles to the west; where the rest of its comrades had moved front-into-line, and lay encamped across the entire horizon.

Save the members of the Hunt, it is very doubtful whether, in the course of twelve months, a single Egertonian passed the line of dense pines that marked the base of the Hill; with the former, however, it was the favorite meet. Here, a fox was always sure; the find quick; the scent fresh. And what though the going were rough and dangerous, and that every year some one died the death; it all went with the sport. As Judge Casson, long ago, paraphrased:—

> "For how can man die happier,
> Than to the music of the pack,
> With the fox in view, before him,
> And the field, in line, at his back?"

Mildred Gascoyne rode to covert with the Fairlawn party. She went with them, because Harwood wished it; but it, also, was notice to Landor that she was not to be deterred by his immediate presence.

"Hello, everybody!" she called, as they came up,

swinging her crop in salute, and taking place beside Evelyn Leicester, who, with Wilberforce, was in the lead. A swift glance had shown that neither Harwood nor Landor was with them; and she wondered.

"Hail to the pilot!" said Wilberforce; "I'm ready to follow her, henceforth and forever, amen."

"She wouldn't be dignified by the following!" Evelyn laughed.

"You see, Diana, it's this way:" he went on, "Harwood was delayed, preparing the pearl in seltzer for Cleopatra, so he picked me to guide the bummers to the reunion. He said I was the only one in the bunch, with sense enough to ask the way, if we got lost."

"Which of us is deified?" Mildred asked, turning to Mrs. Leicester.

"Both!" exclaimed Tony, "both! — you're Diana, however."

"And who am I?" said Evelyn.

"You are Venus—for further information inquire of Colleton Harwood, Esquire—he bestowed the names. I, myself, didn't draw any—I couldn't decide between Mars and Actæon."

"Tony!" cried Evelyn. "You'll shock Mrs. Gascoyne."

"Oh, no!" Mildred laughed, "I quite understand, that Mr. Wilberforce is the official harlequin at Fairlawn; and, at any rate, my blushes are saved, for I never heard of Actæon."

"Then don't let curiosity drive you to investi-

gate," said Mrs. Leicester. "And as for you, Tony, you have overlooked the rule, that when the new pilot takes the wheel the old one retires."

"Must I go, Diana?" he asked, with smiling impertinence. "Ah, I see the light of mercy in those grey eyes! I stay?"

Mildred nodded. "Upon the distinct condition, however, that you don't talk mythology."

"And that, when you do talk," Evelyn added, "you use the deaf-and-dumb language."

To detour the town, meant to double the distance to the meet, so Mildred led through it; up West Street to Centre Square, thence out South Street, and down the pike to the Avenue.—All the while, she listened for the rap of Nero's hoofs behind her. What had delayed Harwood!—What of Landor!—Did it mean, that one had detained the other?—Trouble?

On the crest of the knoll, where a Corps commander, the king of them all, now rides his great, bronze charger, Mildred swung around in saddle and looked back across the valley, to the ridge over which they had just come. As she did so, Harwood and Fordyce passed the summit, and, catching sight of the party, waved their hats and set out in pursuit.

A sly smile twinkled in Mrs. Leicester's black eyes.

"Our host is coming, I see," she remarked, glancing over her shoulder to be sure that Wilberforce—who had dropped behind—was out of earshot; "an-

other penalty for being mistress, as well as master, of Fairlawn."

Mildred bent down, and flicked a bit of dust from Rajah's mane. The sudden joy in her face was not for others' seeing. It was true! her trust was vindicated. There was no bond on Harwood—he was free.

"We, down here, were led to believe that the mistress had been chosen, and was soon to come," she laughed.

"Northumberland wouldn't have made any such mistake," Mrs. Leicester laughed back, offering no pretence of not understanding. "It knows he has been my big brother since our dancing-school days. It's a shame, some nice girl does not land him—heaven knows! enough of them have tried."

"Doubtless, there is their failure."

"No, I shouldn't say so! If Colleton Harwood wanted a woman, he wouldn't be frightened off because he saw she wanted him—and no more, if he saw she didn't want him. He has a fine way of getting what he wants."

"Then it is, that he does not want?"

"Not at all! it is that he hasn't been *made* to want: the right woman has not come—when she does, she will get him. . . . . There was one, once, that might have been she—a girl whom he saw for an instant, several years ago, on the Grand Canal. Their gondolas passed—that was all. He does not know even her name, and yet he still remembers her.

Now, what if he were to come upon her again; not as a vision, but as a present personality, lovelier actually, than in fancy? Would Fairlawn's next mistress be found?"

"No!" said Mildred, instantly, looking her straight in the eyes, "Fairlawn's mistress would not be found."

The frankness of it took Evelyn by surprise; for the moment she had no answer but a startled smile; and then Harwood and Fordyce cantered up, and reined down beside them.

"I was growing very anxious," said Mildred presently, when, the four horses fretting at being held abreast, she and Harwood had ridden ahead.

"That I'd be late at the meet? Not when you are to be there, sweetheart."

"Not so loud, Colleton!"

"I don't care who knows," he smiled. "Everybody is going to know it some day, very soon."

"You foolish boy! be sensible; tell me what detained you—not Landor?—you haven't had trouble with him?"

"Plenty of it."

"Colleton! and after all I said!"

"Just a trifle loud, my dear."

"At least, I trust you didn't come to blows over me!"—with attempted hauteur.

"Not yet, milady; though, if the will went for the deed, his head would have been punched off scores of times."

"And it wasn't he that detained you?"

"Goodness, no, little one; The Queen of the Ptolemies desired my attendance upon matters of state, touching the costume ball to-night. At such times, even one's sweetheart must give place to the cook."

"Isn't Landor riding to-day?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, yes; he will be along presently—he was late in coming down, and so missed the others. He started with me but broke a stirrup leather, near this end of the town, and went back to a harness-shop for another."

"It's a pity, the break didn't hold off until the nastiest jump of the run!" she exclaimed.—"No, I mustn't say such things, even if I do think them."

"You may say anything to me, sweetheart."

"And you must not call me sweetheart, even if you do think it. Didn't we go over it all, yesterday afternoon?"

"We did—and we will go over it again, this afternoon."

"We'll do nothing of the sort!" she retorted, her cheeks rosy. "Didn't I tell you, then, you must never kiss me again?"

"Yes; but I knew you didn't mean it—the kiss itself denied you."

She tried to look indignant; but the smile broke through, and then the adorable laugh.

"There, see how weak I am!" she said. "I ought to be incensed, and send you away. Why

don't you be strong, and help me to do right?"

"My dear little woman," he said, drawing Nero in close beside her, "if I thought you were not doing right, I should help you instantly—by going away from Egerton."

"But I'm not doing right, Colleton. I'm not doing right!"

"Listen, Mildred!" he said. "I have not sought your secret, I do not want it. I have even tried to abstain from thinking of it. Yet, this much is obtrusively evident: there has been something in your past life, which you imagine should keep us apart—prohibits marriage. Whether it is this which Landor knows, matters nothing, as between us, since it is the fact itself, not his knowledge of it, that deters you. For my part, dear, I don't care what it is. I will take you now, on the present—or, if you insist, I will wait until the trouble has cleared away, or you are willing to disregard it. What I won't do, however, is to give you up, or to let you give me up."

She was staring hard at Rajah's brow band; her face very pale, her lips compressed. He thought she was on the edge of tears.

"There, sweetheart," he said, softly, "I was brusque and unkind; we will say no more about it now, and I'll be in for tea at five, as usual."

She gave him a look of such love and supreme faith, as is granted few men to see on a woman's face.

"Yes, dear, come at five," she said.

She would tell him everything; it was the only way to convince him of the hopelessness of his purpose.

They passed through the gate, beyond a spring, and, leaving the avenue, cut across the meadow to the ancient log house, on the edge of the creek. From the porch, an old man called a greeting, and a wish for a speedy fox; then, smiling in recollection of the days when he, too, rode to the chase, he watched them splash through the shallow ford, scarcely fetlock deep, and disappear around the turn, just beyond which, he knew the hunt would be gathered.

The narrow clay road, that led into the Buzzard, was free from fencing, and the Club was scattered along it, and over the narrow, open swale toward the creek. As Mrs. Gascoyne and Harwood rode in, Judge Casson came forward to meet them.

"Are all your folks with you, Colleton?" he asked, after a few minutes' chat.

"All but Landor; don't wait for him, if you're ready; he may not get here."

"Throw off whenever you like, Rawdon!" the Judge called to the M. F. H., who was having a word with Mrs. Leicester.

"That is always the way," Rawdon confided to her; "the old man never wants anyone, but himself, to talk with a pretty woman."

Then he blew the mount, and sent in the dogs.

Scarcely had the last waving white tail disappeared among the rocks and undergrowth, when Badger's deep note spoke the scent. The Hello-Away followed almost instantly. At the same time, Landor dashed through the creek, and joined the tail of the column that was streaming up the road; parallel with which, and only a few rods distant, the pack had laid the course.

But it was not for long, this easy going; the trail turned abruptly to the left, crossed the road into the pines, and bore off obliquely up the acclivity. And with that, the field dissolved; split into twos and threes, driving a way among the trees, winding in and out; lying low in saddle, under scraping branches, through narrow aisles; always bearing toward the call of the horn, or the note of the hounds—the latter growing fainter every minute. It was here that the gamble of the chase was played to the limit—whether to take this path or the other: the one that led seemingly straight, or the one that bent and circled; whether to fling over horn and hound, and, chancing on the scent swinging to the north end of the Hill, bear thither direct, to be waiting when the pack came up, while the field still trailed, far in the rear. The Buzzard was a game of guess! short-cuts? long-cuts? straight-riding? which? They all had won, but it was rare that the same won twice in sequence.

"Let me lead, Colleton!" Mildred had said, as

they dashed into the timber. "I know this ground, you don't."

And Harwood had nodded, smilingly, and drawn back, well content, since they must ride in file, to be where he could watch her, whenever he might shift his eyes from the going, which, in truth, was rare enough. For with the bending and twisting, in and out through the green maze, he needed all his eyes for the rocks and holes, and the branches that lay in wait to sweep him out of saddle. From all over the wood, he could hear the noise of riders; some crossed their track; they crossed others'; occasionally, Mildred would glance back to be sure that he followed, smile, and face quickly around again. The horn still called, at intervals, from the fore, and well above them, the dense leafage of the trees muffling the sound, and, with the very gloom, making it seem still farther away.

Presently, they struck an unusually rough bit of going, where the fallen needles lay deep and slippery, the rocks were larger, the boughs heavier and lower. He held back another length or two, to avoid the least chance of crowding her. Suddenly, a riderless horse dashed out from the trees, paused directly between Mildred and him, then, with a snort, plunged on.

To escape colliding, Nero had come down stiff-kneed, sending Harwood almost out of the saddle; when he recovered, Mrs. Gascoyne had disappeared.

He rode on, in the same direction, guided by the

slant of the hill, and the occasional note of the horn, now very distant. Somewhere to the front, he heard the faint gallop of hoofs—deadened by the carpet of needles—and the scrape of boughs, but, push as he might, he did not gain. Several times, he raised a shout; no answer came. The pines were growing denser, and his speed fell off correspondingly; the noise, in front, had ceased. Presently, he tore through a mass of tangled branches, and into a tiny open space, green with the lush grass of the untrod wood. As he crossed it, with noiseless hoofs, he heard some one far ahead. The timber was thinner here, and he galloped on, lashed, now, only by the needles. He was gaining rapidly—too rapidly; the other was approaching. Abruptly, the pines split into a tiny alley, and trotting down it came the riderless horse. It flung up its head, stopped, wheeled about, and raced away.

Harwood drew rein, and listened. Silence!—dead and heavy as of the heart of a great forest—only the sighing in the trees, the chirp of a bird, the whir of a wing. It seemed incredible, that such solitude could lie so close to the haunts of man. He waited for the horn, or the cry of the pack, to point direction. Neither came; they had passed out of distance. It was too early to abandon the run, and, by turning down grade, reach the meadows along the creek. He gave Nero his head, and followed the alley. The point for him, in his ignorance of the country-side and the probable

course of the fox, was to get out of this labyrinth, and into the open. The alley had been winding like a serpent's trail, along the hill-side, now it bore around, and made directly upward. Near the crest, the pines ended as abruptly as though planted to a line; oak and hickory, huge and stately, grew instead. And now, the ground was mainly fallen trees, rocks, and holes; the latter doubly treacherous with the mould and leaves of years. Over these, Nero went with the care of practised knowledge; and Harwood wisely offered no suggestions. If the rest of the Buzzard were of such going, it was, indeed, merciful for it to claim but one life a year.

Just below the summit, he, for all his haste, brought Nero to a sudden halt. He was on the side of a basin, deep and narrow, wherein the trees were gaunt and stark, shorn of leaf and life; black as though by fire; great hands of death pointing grimly upward with many fingers. Even the ground was of the charnel-house—no blade of grass, no moss, no mould, not so much as the brown of fallen leaf; only the dull grey of the granite rocks, and the livid hue of the nude earth between. . . . . Yet life was there—the life that had worked this death and desolation—great birds in rusty black, perched in scores upon the blasted trees; sideling back and forth; buried in their huge wings; visiting from branch to branch; foul and nauseous, craning their bare, putrid-purple necks, to blear resentfully at this intruder on their privacy.

The very abomination of it held Harwood, in wonder.—And then he understood. They were the Buzzards! the demons of the Hill. He gave Nero his head.

"Come on, boy," he said, "let us get away from here!"

On the crest, he paused again, for some sound of the chase. It were silly to ride to one point of the compass, when any of the other three hundred and fifty-nine were quite as likely to be the proper course. And in a very little while, it came—the horn, faint and far out on the flat to the northeast. Straightway, Nero bolted for it.

It was this same horn, that marked Mildred Gascoyne's coming up with the hunt.

Deceived by the riderless horse, which had swung around into Harwood's place behind her, she had not discovered the mistake until it was too late to remedy. So, in the true spirit of the sport, she left him to his luck, and went on. Moreover, this was the last run of the season, and the next was six months off.

The fox had laid a diagonal course, that crossed the Hill at the highest point, and the pace he set, over such going, would have pumped out the best hunter ever foaled. Mildred had spent hours exploring these thickets; she was familiar with every opening and path in them; and chancing that the quarry would hold to the same line, down the other side, she cut around, mid-way. If she misguessed,

and the trail swung to the right, she was hopelessly out of it.

But the fox ran true, not only over the hill, but on into the level; and without having driven Rajah unduly, she came in sight of the pack, a mile out from the Buzzard. Of the field, there was only a handful; she was alone on the left; on the right, and a bit to the front, were four others whom, as they flashed at intervals into view, she descried as the Huntsman, Mrs. Leicester, Judge Casson, and Fordyce.

The hounds had disappeared behind a clump of locusts—now, they suddenly burst out into a clearing, just ahead, and bore down upon her. The fox had doubled toward the creek.

With a cry to the others, she swerved aside, pulled Rajah to a dancing-halt, and let the pack go by; then followed on the line, a little to the left, with the Judge nearest.

"Thank you, madam!" he had called, as they ranged up.

A little farther on, Mildred and the Judge got into soft ground, and the rest drew ahead. Before them, was a post-and-rider of no especial difficulty. Whether from carelessness or a slip at the take-off, Fordyce caught the top rail; it broke, but too late, and after a desperate effort to save himself, he came a rather easy cropper.

"Are you hurt?" the Judge sang out, as he flew the fence.

Fordyce shook his head, and motioned to go on. The fall had knocked the breath out of him, and, for the moment, he could neither speak nor get up.

But to Evelyn Leicester, who had never seen a spill at full speed, Fordyce was either dead, or grievously injured, and with a cry of indignation at the heartlessness of the others, she dragged Hector down and galloped back, disdaining Rawdon's cry to come on.

And now, with the pack racing so near, heads up, sterns down, scarcely a cry, Mildred gave Rajah the rein, and shot to the front; save Harwood's Nero, he had the heels of them all, on an open course. Over rock and fence, he skimmed in his stride, landing wide-out, with legs extended; the woman on him riding light as half her weight, with hands of silk, and never an ounce of pull that would bunch him, and throw him out of the swing.

"Gad!" Rawdon muttered, as, scorning to bend aside, she flew a nasty, shelving rock with five feet of bushes beyond, "was there ever such another!"

They were back to the pines, now; on the open ground that lay between them and the creek, rough and full of holes, but practically free of trees, except for one short, narrow point that projected directly in Mildred's way. It, she did not scorn; she knew of old, that it were best avoided. The scent ran well below it, and there was ample space for her to circle, without committing the unpardonable crime, of riding the line of the hounds.

As she passed the point, with the dogs only a hundred yards ahead, Henry Landor emerged from the main wood, and bore down upon her at a gallop. It did not occur to her to be surprised, that he should break in here. All she felt, was a sudden rush of anger, that the end of the chase was to be spoiled by this man's hateful presence. It was impossible to avoid him; he was much nearer the pack, and his horse was quite fresh.

"Good morning, my dear!" he said, with grinning familiarity, ranging up beside her; "this is a most unexpected pleasure." When she made no reply, either by look or word, he went on: "I'm well repaid, now, for being left at the start—lost in the pines; remitted to self-control, and the beauties of the immediate landscape; the latter measuring about six by six—the *former*, I flatter myself, you may still remember."

She continued to ignore him. He laughed, mockingly, and moved nearer; never noting the look in the grey eyes, and the set of the pretty lips.

"At least, you can remember so far back as yesterday evening, and that you were given until the meet, this morning, to answer a certain proposition."—He leaned over close. "What is the answer, my dear?"

She still ignored him, save to draw Rajah away.

He followed.

"Keep off, sir!" she ordered. "We are coming to a fence."

"The answer!" he demanded.

"Keep off, I say!"

He took the tremble of anger in her voice, for fear.

"The answer!" he said, sharply, daring to press so near that his boot brushed her skirt.

"*This!*" she cried, and drove Rajah glancingly against his horse's shoulder.

The next moment, the big bay rose to the fence, while his sorrel, staggering and struggling to keep his feet, brought up against it with a smash.

Simultaneously, Judge Casson and the M. F. H. turned, and looked at each other. They knew, she had done it intentionally—but, why? And they regarded Landor with curious eyes, as they passed him circling back for a fresh try at the fence.

For the last few minutes, the hounds had been "running for blood," the savage earnestness that indicates a burning scent. Now, of a sudden, went up the fierce clamor of hate, as they passed from scent to view. And only a very short view; not a hundred yards away, the fox, hitherto hidden by the long grass and boulders, had glided across a stony hollow. He was tired—beaten—but struggling, gamely, for the line of rocks, less than a sixth of a mile ahead. There lay his den, and safety. He called up the last ounce of his strength, and, careful no longer for cover, went bounding onward with all the speed he owned. Loud behind him, rang the horn and the cries of the pack; there, before him,

the big rock beckoned to the dark home beneath. He jerked a quick look over his shoulder—he was losing. He spurted forward, held his own a moment, then began to lose again. He could do no better—his strength was slipping fast. Another look—they were gaining rapidly—he could see the glint of old Badger's teeth, the pitiless gleam of his eager eyes. He knew, now, that he could never reach the beckoning rock, and the dark hole beneath. He turned abruptly toward the creek. It was but half so far away, and just here, as he knew well, deep and quiet, with timber close to the other shore. If he could gain it, he might out-swim his enemies, and, doubling back further down, win the waiting haven.

For a few feet, he held his own; then Badger, with a spurt of tremendous speed, closed in. There was a snarl—the snap of a long, narrow, punishing jaw, that streaked a white neck with crimson,—an answering roar of furious joy—and dog and fox went rolling over and over, the one's strong teeth buried in the other's throat. The next instant, the whole pack was upon them.

Flinging the rein over Rajah's head, Mildred leaped from saddle, and, springing into the centre of the fighting heap, laid vigorously about her with her crop. Almost immediately, Judge Casson and Rawdon were beside her. The former, a foot on the fox's neck, pulled back the brush and cut it off.

"One more for madame!" he said, bowing it to her.

Then he swung aloft the body.

"Whoop-up! Tear him!" he cried, and flung it to the dogs.

As the Judge put Mildred into saddle, Henry Landor came up.

"Well ridden, Mrs. Gascoyne!" he said. "And a million apologies for *my* criminal awkwardness, at the last fence. It might readily have been fatal."

She looked at him, with the most deliberate indifference.

"It did not trouble me in the slightest, I assure you. . . . . Shall we wait for the field to come up, Mr. Rawdon!"

XVI

KNAVE, QUEEN AND KING

A SHORT while before five o'clock, that afternoon, Landor went over to The Oaks. This time, however, he did not use the front entrance. He went by the rear, as unobtrusively as possible.

Yesterday, he was admitted,—by direct instruction, he was now convinced—to-day, after the affair of the Hunt, the droopy-eyed butler would inform him, with the impassivity of a graven image, that Mrs. Gascoyne was not at home. Then, it was either to go through him, or to resort to strategy. And as he was fully determined upon having this last talk with her, before the Ball that night, it seemed to indicate a gentle putting aside of Brown, and a search for the lady, even unto her apartments. It would be unpleasantly vigorous, doubtless, but, under all the circumstances, legitimate and justifiable.

However, luck favored him. As he turned the hedge, at the rear of The Oaks, the butler came from the side door and went rapidly down to the Avenue. This meant that one of the maids would be on duty. Avoiding the front steps, by crossing the piazza from the end, he pushed the bell, and drew aside out of line of the glass panels.

"Is Mrs. Gascoyne at home?" he asked—in the

of-course-she-is tone, that is always hard for a servant to face—and continued, without waiting for a reply: "Please say to her that Mr. Burgoyne, from over at Fairlawn, would like to see her, just a moment."

He took the chance, that the maid did not know either Burgoyne or him, and won. The hesitation in her face vanished at mention of the name, and, dropping a card on the tray, now extended, he passed quickly into the drawing-room.

Unless Mrs. Gascoyne had seen him approaching the house, or took the precaution to question the maid minutely as to the visitor's appearance, the ruse would succeed, and he waited eagerly for the return of the servant. She did not come—instead, there was a quick, light step on the stairway, the swish of skirts, and Mildred herself entered, the card still between her fingers.

"And how is Mr. Burgoyne!" she said, the subdued light preventing her, for the moment, detecting the imposture.

Landor stepped quickly between her and the door.

"Really, I haven't the remotest idea!" he said.

Her surprise was so apparent that he laughed softly in derision. It steadied her instantly.

"This is your card?" she asked.

"It is the one I sent in to you."

She went to a window and shot up the shade, letting in the day.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Burgoyne?" she said.

"I have an appointment very shortly, but I can give you the moment you asked for."

Landor grinned, and took up his favorite attitude of leaning on the mantle.

"I'm not Burgoyne, now," he replied; "I was he only until I got in here."

She held up the card.

"Mr. Leigh Burgoyne, The Northumberland Club," she read aloud; then laid it aside, and looked at him inquiringly.

"You seem to be partial to masquerades!" he laughed; "so suppose we discuss them, beginning with your own. I did not quite understand your answer, just before the kill this morning—unless it were that dead men tell no tales. . . . . In which case, it failed of pertinence, and some other answer is necessary. It is for that, I have come."

She regarded him with an air of polite surprise.

"My dear Mr. Burgoyne," she said, "I am quite at a loss for your meaning. You rode to covert with the Fairlawn party, I remember, but I'm quite sure I did not see you any time during the run, much less speak to you." She leaned forward and scrutinized his face. "No, he doesn't appear to have been drinking!" she reflected, aloud.

"Still on the part!"—he sneered; "always the play-actress. Well, it is not surprising, after so many years of constant practise. Now, however, my dear Mildred, the mask comes off—whether to the whole world, or only to me, is for you to de-

termine. Honor me with a few dollars, out of your vast abundance, and I will leave you free to cozen these poor fools around here, including the Master of Fairlawn, to your pretty face's content; and I will engage, further, never to recognize you, hereafter."

Again she leaned forward, and studied him curiously.

"No, he *isn't* drunk!" she said, musingly, "so he must have suddenly become demented. I wonder how I can get him away.—Oh, to be sure! My dear Mr. Burgoyne, of course I'll be delighted to give you the money, but it happens that I haven't any cash in the house, so, if you will drive along with me to town, I'll get it for you. I'll go and order the carriage, at once."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" he said sharply, springing to the doorway, "and you will quit this silly nonsense, and come down to business. It is your last chance. Either we deal now, or I'll proclaim you to-morrow. It is only out of consideration for my friend Harwood, that I'll wait until after his Ball to-night. It would be spoiled utterly for him, if *you* were not there.—Ah! that stings, does it! the idea of losing the neighbor. Doubtless there have been numerous *neighbors*, in these ten years. By the way, who was Gascoyne—the last, the first, or one of the intermediates?"

She perceived that he was now absolutely sure of his recognition, and had determined to act. It,

therefore, was useless longer to deny her identity. The time was come for her to show her hand. She had been leaning elbow on chair-arm, chin in palm, regarding him in steady contempt. Now she sat up, with a shrug, and a bit of a mocking laugh.

"Let us give over insinuations," she said, "and, as you put it, come down to business."

"You admit your identity?" he demanded.

"Naturally."

Involuntarily, his eyes sought her hair. It had always been the one inexplicable—the basis of all his doubt.

"Will you account for it?" he asked.

"No!" she said curtly. "Let us proceed with the matter in hand. Just what is it you demand?"

"Seventy-five thousand dollars."

The answer was instant as the crack of a whip, when the lash snaps back.

"In exchange, you offer what?"

"Immunity from recognition."

"Refused!" she said. "Is that all?"

It was so sudden, and so totally unexpected that Landor stared at her, in undisguised amazement. Then a malevolent smile crossed his handsome face; he bowed slightly.

"That is all," he answered, turning toward the door. "To-morrow the deluge!"

"One moment, if you please!" she said. "Has it occurred to you that you may not be the only owner of a deluge?—that I, too, may be aware of

a few things, which it were well for you should not be disclosed?"

"For instance?" he asked, leaning gracefully against the door.

"Burglary!—the brave gentleman outside the window, waiting to enter or to run, as discretion called—and running."

"And hence not seen!" he retorted; "the vagabond's story proves nothing, even if you had him—and you haven't."

"No, I haven't; in fact, I sent him away, myself. One blackmailer, in the neighborhood, is ample. Besides, I don't need him—you *were* seen."

"By you?" he scoffed.

"Yes, by me, when you inspected the window—by another, when you came with the tramp; nor is this other of my household."

"So! I understand, now, the promptness of the lights and the huge revolver. Also, my great good fortune in sending a substitute. It would have been a glorious opportunity to kill me, with every apparent justification. And as I remember your shooting, Mildred, there wasn't a chance you'd miss."

"Perhaps you are right," she answered; "the temptation would have been so very pleasant, and the act so wholly commendable. Yes, it is a pity that you didn't come in yourself."

"But as I didn't, I fail to discern a deluge in it now. I hardly fancy, that you will be such a fool

as even to mention the 'burglary' to any one. What you want is silence."

"Just so," she said; "and I'm ready to trade your crime for your silence. The deluge bursts only if you talk."

He laughed softly, in derision, and drawing out his cigarettes offered them to her.

"Have one?" he asked.—"No?—another reformation?—or is it, that Harwood does not approve?" He replaced the case, and laughed again. "Is that the only deluge you have ready?"

He had anticipated the burglary threat, and was prepared to scorn it. Lacking the tramp's testimony, it would be impossible to implicate him; and he felt confident, that Judge Casson would not permit her to prosecute on insufficient evidence. But it was a very different situation, if he had been detected examining the windows, and, later, engaged in the actual breaking (it was he who opened the catch and raised the sash).

"There is a young lady, by name, Miss Gordon, at Fairlawn, isn't there?" Mildred asked, ignoring his gibes.

"Why discuss the obvious?" he asked, though his black eyes flashed, in quick suspicion.

"And Miss Gordon is an heiress, of large, very large wealth?"

"Jealous?" he jeered.

"And you"—she went on, imperturbably—"have been more or less devoted to her?"

"Rather more!" he laughed.

"To such an extent, indeed, that your engagement is generally accepted?"

"Very jealous! Really, my dear Mildred, I shouldn't have believed it, after all these years. Yet, I must say, I do not see the pertinency of these cold-storage questions."

"Also, Mr. Landor, I understand that you are heavily involved financially."

No answer; only a questioning stare.

"Practically bankrupt, indeed."

No answer; still, the stare.

"You are, at this moment, in need of a considerable sum of money—so seriously in need, that, unless you get it, and quickly, you will be in grave peril of prison"—(something in his eyes told her, that her intuition had prompted her truly, and she pressed on)—"are in grave peril, now, I might guess. Do you grasp the pertinency, yet?"

"Not in the slightest," he replied, with a languid shrug. "But you are playing the part—whatever it may be—with such amazing skill, I beg that you will continue; good acting is always entertaining."

The clock, on the landing, began to strike five. Mildred arose.

"The play, as you are pleased to term it, is over," she said, "but I give you this epilogue: You must have money. You can't get it from me. You may be able to cozen it out of Miss Gordon—at least, she is your only hope. You seem to have

forgot that, when you unmask me, you also unmask yourself. Then, exit Gordon and her money; and enter—the police, is it?—At all events, my time has expired; I wish you good-evening."

"A very pretty epilogue!" he mocked, "but unconvincing because fallacious. Moreover, I assure you that, in the unmasking, I shall not involve myself to the extent you have in mind. What smirches a woman forever, does not affect the man. Of course, you can cry your story, if you wish, but mine will have been such that, no matter what you tell, the smirch will linger.—You understand, I see." At the door, he paused. "You will have until the breaking of the Ball, to-night, to reconsider—after that, the deluge!"

With a malicious laugh, and a low bow, he left her.

Mildred gave an exclamation of intense relief, when the door closed behind him.

"Why didn't I ride him down this morning!" she exclaimed, her long-suppressed anger flashing forth. "What maudlin sense of pity held me! I'm a silly fool, to have let the chance go by!" She struck the chair-arm, with her clenched hands. "Won't you give me another chance to-night, Henry Landor?——"

The very hate of him drove her to the window; and there, for the moment, he was forgot. Harwood was coming up the path. She drew aside the curtains, and motioned him to enter.

She met him with both hands extended, and, when he drew her to him, she went willingly and at once; meeting his embrace with such a warmth and abandon, that he swept her up into his arms; kissing her on lips, and cheek, and ruddy hair, until she cried, laughingly, for mercy.

"Don't take all of them at once, dear," she whispered; "and, besides, you must be good. You mustn't kiss m—! . . . . It isn't ri—! . . . . Just see my hair,"—as he released her, and stood back, smiling joyously—"I'm ashamed to have the servant bring in the tray."

"Bother the tea!" he said, watching her slim fingers playing over the tousled coiffure. "I'm drunk enough, as it is——"

"I quite agree; you are worse than disorderly.—No—don't resume it!—stay where you are! . . . . Oh, Colleton. Now I've got it all to fix over anew. I shall go upstairs, if you misbehave again."

"Within how many minutes?"

"Ever!" sitting down, and pointing to the sofa on the opposite side of the room.

Instead, he came over and leaned on the back of her chair.

"I shall tell it at the Ball to-night," he said.

"Tell what?" she asked.

"That Fairlawn has found its chatelaine."

She sprang away, amazed.

"Me!" she cried. "You can't mean me, Colleton!"

"Whom else should I mean?" he asked, wonderingly.

"You took my greeting for consent? Oh, I'm so sorry; forgive me, dear! I didn't mean it so——"

"Why not mean it, sweetheart?" he asked, taking her to him. "Why not consent?"

She tried to draw away, but he held her close.

"Why not consent, dear one?" he pleaded—"why not consent?"

She flung both arms around his neck.

"Because I cannot!" she answered, "I cannot!—I am Henry Landor's wife!"

And then the sobs came.

He looked down at her with infinite tenderness, and stroked softly the gleaming hair. Scores of questions pressed for utterance, but he put them aside, and drove surprise from his voice. Her distress was his first duty.

"Don't, sweetheart," he said, presently—"a woman's tears touch a man deeper than the most exquisite pain. And it will come all right, in the end. There is some way out, and we will find it."

"There is no way out!" she answered, dashing away the tears, and trying to smile.

"There is always a way to divorce."

"You would marry a divorced woman?"

"Why not?—especially, if she be *you?*"

She took his hand, and laid it along her cheek, caressingly.

"Even divorce is denied us, Colleton," she said.

"Your church?"

"No. It was that, at first; but not now—I have got bravely over such nonsense."

"Good!" he exclaimed, in supreme relief. It was the one thing he feared. "It's clear sailing, then—there never was a divorce wanted, in America, that could not be had legally, somewhere. Come, dear, tell me the whole story—let me look for the way out."

He put her in a chair by the window, where the slanting sunlight danced, with iridated steps, among the ruddy hair.

"Now, sweetheart!" he said.

"Where shall I begin," she asked; "with the wedding?"

He nodded.

"I married Landor privately, almost secretly, ten years ago, in New York, after an acquaintance of less than a week. Of course, there was no excuse; but the reason was, orphanage since childhood—years spent in the close confinement, and the man-banishment, of a notably strict convent school (wherein my dear guardian was pleased to imprison me, during the period of his authority)—the natural rebound, upon release and entire freedom from restraint—the absolute possession, at eighteen, of ample wealth—the impetuousness of a first infatuation, and the practised wiles of a handsome, fascinating scoundrel.

"I married him, a light-hearted, happy child. I left him, less than a month thereafter, a heart-sick, and embittered woman. He had ensnared me, solely for my fortune. I had little physical beauty to attract him; such as I have came later—even this;" (touching her hair) "it was black, and not over-abundant. We went abroad immediately. Before we were out twenty-four hours, he was maneuvering to get possession of my money. It went on persistently, day after day; blandishments, then persuasion, argument, insistence, demands, threats—violence.—He ran the whole gamut in a week. He knocked me down, repeatedly—never with his fist, it would leave a mark; but with pillows, striking me in the face a sweeping blow, that almost never failed to send me prostrate. At first, I was simply surprised and unhappy; then, as he grew worse, and I began to understand his motives, I went furious. I defied him, I reviled him. I fear I did everything but return his blows. I hated him, now, so fiercely that, dominated by the convent's teaching, I began to fear for the safety of my soul. Divorce was not to be thought of—to me, then, marriage was Heaven-made and indissoluble.

"Racked between hate and the bigotry of Creed, I hit upon a middle course. I offered him a money consideration for a separation. He demanded half my fortune. We compromised on a fifth. The agreement was put in duplicate, and signed by us both. We mutually released each other from all

personal obligations and rights of inheritance. The marriage was never to be referred to, by either. If, by chance, we met, there was not to be the slightest recognition (which he violates, now, because he wishes more money)—and, lastly, save for re-marriage, both were to be absolutely untrammelled in action, to the widest limit.

"This was in Vienna. He departed, forthwith, and, until the other night in the hall of Fairlawn, I have never seen him since. I lingered a few days; then went to London, assuming, for the purpose of concealment, my present name. There, I collapsed. For months, I lay in a hospital; my brain on fire; life and reason in the balance. At last, they won; and then, to the marvel of the physicians, my voice-tones were softened, and my hair, when it was permitted to grow, was red. They could not explain it, but that didn't alter the fact. It is this change in me, that puzzled Landor, and made him so doubtful of his recognition.

"Having no near relatives, indeed, not a soul on earth for whom I cared a single thought, I buried myself in myself, and with Mrs. Jamison—who had been my nurse in the hospital—wandered over Europe for years. Through my bankers, I kept informed of Landor's whereabouts; other than them, however, I had no communication with any one, in America. Many times, I met persons I had known before my marriage, but they never recognized me. Once, on the terrace at Monte Carlo,

I came face to face with the girl who was my particular chum, at the convent; she looked me over, in the impudently appraising way women have with one another, and passed on. Yet, within that week, I had received through the bankers, a letter from her, addressed to me by my maiden name, wanting to know all about me since our graduation. It was this conclusive proof of my disguise, which made me willing to return to the United States. When I left Venice, the day after our affair on the Canal, I was bound for New York. Last Autumn, I drifted here; I liked the country and the riding; and, later, the people—when I got to know them. I rented this house; and—that is all."

Harwood was one of those rare individuals, who never interrupt a narrative to ask a question; he knew that, if he waited, and the question were really material, the answer was pretty sure to appear, further on. If it did not, then was the time to ask it. So he had said no word, while Mildred told her story; and, at the conclusion, save for minor details, there was little needful for a clear understanding of the situation. It needed, however, the agreement of separation and a lawyer, to know the legal aspect of the question, as to divorce. But even his lay mind could appreciate something of the impediment in the article, if its terms were as she gave them. So far as he could see, there was, at the moment, no ground whatever for her to obtain release.

"You have your copy of the agreement?" he asked.

"Not here; it is at my bankers."

"Would you be willing to show it to Judge Casson, for his opinion? . . . . No? Then, will you give me an order for it, and let me consult some responsible lawyer, there, who does not know either of us?"

"Yes, dear—if you wish it."

"And you will divorce him, if, under the agreement and his life since, there be a way?"

"Gladly! Gladly!"

"And then, Fairlawn gets its Betty Colleton."

"She would be little pleased with her successor," Mildred answered. "No; it is not right to burden yourself with a divorced woman. You owe it to your name, to give Fairlawn a mistress above reproach." She bent over and took his hands. "I love you too much, Colleton, to let you marry me."

He put her objection aside with an indulgent smile, bent on bringing her to cheerfulness.

"Mildred!" he said, drawing her still nearer, "there is no more doubt of your marrying me, than there is that I love you—and you believe that, don't you?"

She looked at him, seriously, and no answering smile broke through.

"Yes, dear, I believe it—and there's the pity for us both; it makes me none the less Landor's wife. Nor is that all. He says he will smirch me."

"I do not understand," said Harwood.

"Landor was here, just now; you should have passed him on the avenue. He demanded seventy-five thousand dollars as the price of silence; if I refuse, he will proclaim me as his wife, but with such detail as will dishonor me."

Harwood's face had lost the pleasant smile; it was stern and hard.

"Incredible!" he exclaimed; "even in him, incredible!"

"No; it's not incredible. Another Northumbrian did just that same thing, not long ago—and more, he thereby smirched his child, also. No, no, dear, it is not incredible—not where Landor is concerned. He will do it, if I refuse to pay.—And I shall refuse. He will drain me of every dollar, if I let him intimidate me. I was silly enough once to condone his brutality, by that agreement of separation; I shan't err again. It is divorce, now.—But that won't help us, Colleton—he will smirch me all the deeper, then."

"My dear little girl! you can't imagine that anything he, or anyone else, were to say against you would affect me! Landor and his tales be damned! —I beg your pardon, Mildred; I——"

"I liked it, dear," she said; then bent down close to him. "You may kiss me, for it, if you wish."

If he wished!

"There, that will do! I meant you to take only one."

"I was kissing away the smirch!" he smiled. Then he sobered. "By all means, dear, refuse to pay; his attempt to extort will go far to account for his aspersions, and help much toward the divorce. If only we were back in the days of small clothes and rapier! I should have a friend pick a quarrel with him, and run him neatly through the heart—or do it myself; preferably the latter.—When are you to give him your answer?"

"My time expires with the breaking of the Ball."

"Shall I permit him to remain for it?"

"Yes—I want to end with him, if possible."

"As you wish—though I should like to expose him to the guests, and have him turned out, forcibly."

"You can do that, to-morrow; after he exposes me."

Harwood smiled grimly. "I shall send for you to come over and see the turning out.—And it may be well to retain him to-night, if you can manage to have me overhear your talk. It might be useful evidence, in the divorce case; though, as he could show me to be anything but a disinterested witness, someone else would be more effective."

She shook her head, decidedly.

"No! at present, I want no other confidant than you," she answered. "And there isn't any need for talk; I refused this afternoon. There is no occasion to address him, unless I change—which I won't. Nor am I so sure he will denounce me,

to-morrow. He has another string to the bow." And she told him of Hilda Gordon.

"Well!" said Harwood, when she ended. "Tony seems to be about right.—He has always insisted that Landor has a yellow streak. The only mistake he made, is in the number."

A little later, as he arose to go, he noticed, on a table, the snuff-box. He picked it up, and looked inside and out for the marks.

"They are not there, now," she explained. "I had them removed, the next morning."

"What were they, dear?" he asked, curiously.—"May I know?"

"The date of the marriage, and a word in Greek; Landor scratched them in the lid, the evening after the ceremony."

"And the word?"

"'*AEI.*'"

He laughed softly.

"I will put it back," he said, "but with another date."

XVII

THE PENALTY OF THE LOOSENED TONGUE

Before Harwood went back to Northumberland, he had talked over, with Judge Casson, the matter of a large evening function at Fairlawn, in which all social Egerton could be included. Being a bachelor, he saw no occasion for waiting until he himself had been entertained, and it would afford the opportunity to meet everyone promptly, as well as show his good will and desire to be one of them.

And the Judge had heartily approved; assuring him that it would be fully in accord with the Fairlawn custom and tradition—that the new Master always gave a Ball at the end of the period of mourning, which Captain Beverly, in his will, had specifically directed his son should not exceed a period of six months. Thereafter, this limitation had always been honored by the heir, as, indeed, was everything touching him and the fair Betty.

As to the character of the entertainment, the Judge had favored a Costume Ball. He spoke of a number he had attended at Fairlawn; particularly one of some forty years before, of marvellous beauty and success. To Harwood's suggestion, that the Egertonians might not care to purchase, nor to prepare special dress, for only an evening's diversion, he explained that it would not be necessary;

every family had, laid away in lavender, more than enough beautiful, old costumes to supply its members, twice over—men as well as women; adding that the hair trunks and the chests, in Fairlawn's own garret, contained sufficient for all the guests he might bring with him.

Harwood offered no further objection. The affair appealed to him strongly; it was particularly appropriate to the old house; it was picturesque; and it should be sufficiently informal, even from the start, to make it a success. So, he delegated to the Judge the sending of the invitations—he would know whom to bid—and himself notified Mrs. Leicester to advise her party, so that they could come prepared. It was doubtless true as to the supply of costumes at Fairlawn, but he had no mind to impose them upon those whom Evelyn would bring down. If they wanted any of them, after they got here, and had looked them over, well and good; but he knew better than to oblige a woman to wear a gown not of her own choosing.

For himself, however, the Fairlawn collection sufficed. As they crossed the hall, a little later that evening, the Judge's glance had fallen upon the Peale portrait of Captain Beverly Harwood, in Continental uniform. He wheeled Colleton into the drawing-room, and, halting before it, told him, *there* was his costume,—and that, for him to wear it, the most gracious compliment he could pay his new friends. In the same breath, he sent William to get

it; and when it was come, he opened the tin case and took out the regimental coat of blue faced with red, the single epaulette of gold, the blue waistcoat, the knee breeches of white. Meanwhile, from the wall in the library, William had brought the silver-hilted, slender dress-sword.

And Harwood had looked at the portrait, and down at the uniform, and up again at the portrait; and then, to please the Judge much, and maybe himself a little, he consented; conditioned, of course, that it pleased the uniform to fit him.

Harwood received his guests in the hall, with Judge Casson beside him to present them. For to-night, the mellow light of innumerable candles, softened the cold, white glare of the electricity, and shone smilingly upon the silks and satins, the broadcloth and velvet of these Egertonians of long ago—as they thronged through the wide panelled-hall, past the man in Continental uniform, who—hair powdered, cocked-hat under arm, dress-sword by side—greeted them with all the gracious courtesy and courtly manner of Captain Beverly himself.

"You do Fairlawn proud, sir!" the old man exclaimed, when the line ended, and they stood for a moment alone. "Never in my time, sir, has it had a more gallant Master—and I have known three."

Harwood put the compliment aside, with a laugh.

"Are there many more guests to come?" he asked.

"No," said the Judge, after a moment's consideration, "I think they all are here. If they're not, they ought to be; so don't wait, if you want to move around."

Harwood looked at him quizzically.

"Haven't you forgot at least one?" he asked—"I didn't observe Mrs. Gascoyne go by."

"By gracious, sir, you're right! But I'm glad to see that you remembered." He hesitated, looked away; then, suddenly, it came out. "Tell me, my boy, tell me! are Mrs. Leicester and you betrothed?"

Harwood dropped a hand contritely upon the other's shoulder.

"My dear, old friend!" he said, "it was not kind in me to have led you to that notion, at that first dinner of ours. Mrs. Leicester and I are not engaged, and never shall be—go in and win her, if you wish," as a smile broke over the wrinkled face.

"It wasn't for myself, I asked," the Judge replied. "I am past the age of marriageable discrimination. It was because I hoped that, if it were not Mrs. Leicester, it might—perchance,—be another.—Now, sir, I have transgressed beyond all proper limits!—I beg your——"

"Whom do you mean, Judge Casson?" said Harwood.—"Mrs. Gascoyne?"

"Mrs. Gascoyne."

"Then, let me tell you, in strictest confidence, that I have already done myself the honor of asking her to become Fairlawn's mistress."

"And she accepted?—She accepted?"

"No—but I have hopes.—Ah, there she is, now!"

He stepped out to meet her. The slender figure in white velvet skirt and tight-fitting, military tunic, braided and corded in gold, a short black cape around her shoulders, a white-plumed, silver helmet on the ruddy hair.

"At last!" he said, bowing over her hand. "I was growing anxious. Now, the real evening begins."

"You dear flatterer!" she answered, softly, her fingers pressing his.

"Let us walk," he said—"into the garden, where I can tell you *properly*, just how lovely you are; there the shadows and hedges——"

"Wait," she smiled, "wait a little while; for us to go off together, at once, would provoke comment —you are the host, you must remember. Come, in an hour."

"Where shall I find you?"

"Oh, with some nice man," she teased—"down in the garden!"

"Certainly—down in the garden with me," said Wilberforce, coming up behind them, costumed as a Pilgrim Father, the corners of his mouth pencilled down for piety, a pack of playing-cards sewed over

his coat, a copy of Masuccio in his hand. "Back to your post, you ass in a lion's skin!" he commanded. "Diana wants the real goods—to wit, myself—an honest intolerant on to his job." He offered both his arms, down the sleeves of which the red court-cards were strung in suit. "Which will you have, lady—diamonds or hearts?"

"Diamonds!" laughed Mildred, with a quick glance at Colleton—which Tony intercepted.

"Which leaves the hearts for some one else, you mean," he said, instantly. "So be it, my children—*pax vobiscum!* You'll find us in the garden, Harwood."

Colleton went back to the Judge. The old man wore the suit of a Colonial ancestor, and—in blue broadcloth coat trimmed in gold, and cut back over a be-laced shirt and flowered waistcoat, breeches of white satin, black silk stockings and low-shoes with silver buckles, tall cravat marvellously folded, powdered wig tied with ribbon at the neck—he looked the old régime, indeed.

"Would you like to walk through the rooms with me?" said Colleton.

"Very much, sir, very much—Harwood and Casson together, as of yore. I love the past, and the things of it. I'm glad to get back into it to-night—for the last time, doubtless, for the last time."

The music glided softly into the dreamy, sensuous waltz of a recent fame; the dancers began to sway slowly through the drawing-room and out into the

hall. Here and there, a bare and rounded arm hung far out, marking with languorous wrist, the intoxicating throb of the rhythm. Harwood himself, unconsciously, was humming, faintly, the words.

"The modern dance may be well enough," the Judge went on, "but, to my mind, it grows more abandoned every year. Give me, sir, the minuet, or the gay, romping Virginia reel."

"We will have the reel to-night," said Harwood; "it shall close the ball.—Oh! Mrs. Leicester says you had a nasty crack on the head, this morning, how is it?"

"Well, I'm old enough to admit that it is pretty sore. It was glancing blow; had the limb hit me full, the Buzzard would have claimed its own again. As it was, I rode a mile at least, automatically, conscious but not knowing. I've got a knob under the wig, near the temple, as big as your fist—or it feels so——"

Evelyn Leicester swung slowly by in Fordyce's sturdy arm; the spangled scarlet and black of her Spanish dress, outlined sharply against his Louis Quinze suit of white silk. She caught Harwood's eye, and flung him a kiss, and an alluring smile.

"The lady is something of a coquette," the Judge remarked. "And quite between ourselves, my boy, she has my indifferent nephew considerably fussed—as your Mr. Wilberforce, would say. I believe he is actually falling in love. Sometimes, there

are young fools, as well as old ones. He ought to know that such as Mrs. Leicester are not for him—even if he be a Fordyce of Egerton, he is only a country-lawyer; she is a beauty and heiress of the great world."

"My dear Judge, you are much too modest. Why shouldn't Fordyce seek her, if he wish, and she give him hope? If Evelyn marry again, it will be solely for love, I assure you. Moreover, I'm sufficiently selfish to wish him well—I should be delighted to have her here in Egerton. And it would be a fine thing for Egerton, too."

Evelyn and Fordyce came circling back, and she halted suddenly.

"Come, Colleton!" she commanded, "dance with me."

With an indulgent laugh, he slipped his arm about her lithe waist and swung her away.

"Wait!" she called back to Fordyce, imperiously.

"Will he wait?" Harwood asked.

"I think so," she said, a merry gleam in the black eyes—"he is becoming very tractable."

"They all do, for you! Yet isn't this rather heartless, Evelyn? You wouldn't marry him."

She raised her eyebrows. "Is that a question or a conclusion?"

"Both."

"Why shouldn't I marry him?"

"I haven't any reason—you have dozens."

"A few of which are?"

"As apparent to you as to me."

"Should you be surprised, if I married him?"

"Good Lord, yes! You're not contemplating it?"

"No — not contemplating, yet — considering, maybe." She looked up with sudden seriousness. "There is something very dependable in him, Colleton—almost as dependable as you, dear. And he is a gentleman—well-born—and a man, all around.—I'm getting old enough to recognize the real sort. They seem to be rather rare, too; and now, since you are about to desert me, it's——"

"I have no notion of deserting you!" his arm gathering her closer.

"Don't let Fordyce see you!" she laughed; "he is sufficiently jealous as it is—*he* doesn't see that you are bent on marrying the widow."

"And you do?"

"Aren't you?" she demanded.

He lowered his head close to hers. "If she will have me, yes."

She had not been wholly in earnest, and for a moment she made no reply.

"Are you quite sure, Colleton, that it is wise?" she asked, doubtfully. "What about Landor?"

"I know all about Landor—she knew him when she was a mere girl—and now Evelyn, promise me that you will be content with that, and let the matter drop."

"Of course, I'll promise, dear! I'll do it for her, as well as for you. It is none of my affair, anyway—you are quite capable of judging for yourself. And I like her—I have from the very first.—You shall live at Fairlawn?"

"Yes—whether Mrs. Gascoyne marry me, or not, I shall live here."

"Really, you make me more than ever inclined to marry in Egerton," she laughed.

Then the music ceased, and he took her back to Fordyce.

"Madame thinks I have kept you waiting overlong!" he said. "If so"—bowing to her, hat on breast, and hand on sword hilt—"my apology must be madame, herself.—How was that, for living up to my costume?" and slipping his hand through Judge Casson's arm, he bore him off for a tour of the house and garden and a word with the older guests.

Meanwhile, Henry Landor, handsome as a hero, in bonnet, doublet, and hose of black, having done his duty in the house, had slipped out to the garden, alone. He had seen Mrs. Gascoyne go with Wilberforce, and he sought another word with her, before he essayed the final play with Hilda Gordon. There had been a very disquieting letter from his office awaiting him, that afternoon, when he returned from The Oaks—the Firm had directed a Northumberland attorney to look into the matter of the Bonds. So it was for him to strike for the

money, this very night. What his people wanted was the cash; they would be more than willing not to prosecute. Banks and brokers are always ready to become accessory after the fact, to any embezzlement or defalcation from themselves, so long as the amount is refunded.

On a bench, near the postern gate, he, presently, discerned the pair he sought. Sauntering slowly down the path, he affected to recognize them only as he was passing.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "you are a selfish chap, Wilberforce. You've monopolized Mrs. Gascoyne ever since she came. It is my turn now—run along."

Wilberforce felt the faintest touch of detention on his arm,—and understood.

"Your turn doesn't come until the morning after to-morrow," he said, waving Landor away. "Be gone, until the appointed hour!"

"And will not madame herself intervene for me?" asked Landor, with a meaning glance.

"Madame will not," said Mildred curtly.

"Nor any time—before the breaking of the Ball?"

"Nor any time."—Then she flouted him.—"I am promised to Monsieur Harwood until the breaking of the Ball."

"Selah!" said Tony. "Vamose!"

But Landor had the last word.

"Only until *then?*" he asked gayly, as he turned

away. "Give him my compliments and best wishes."

To Mildred, however, the mockery and insinuation were very plain.

Hilda Gordon was with a crowd in the billiard-room, when Landor joined her. She met him with a familiar little nod, and a welcoming smile.

"Now, I've done my duty by the mob," he said; "so come along and do yours, by being nice to me. Shall we dance?"

"Yes, just a turn, and then to the garden."

She was determined to bring him to capitulation to-night—to which end, the dance would be a helpful preliminary; and she gave herself to him with an alluringness, which, with her costume, scandalized the amiable dowagers into quick retreat, and well-nigh precipitated a riot among the Egertonian men, in their effort to secure her, when the music stopped.

But she laughed them all away, until after supper, leaving them staring at her, as she went off with Landor. And she was good to stare at, in her daringly cut gown of crimson silk, and black silk stockings glistening almost to her knees.

"You have the devil in you to-night, Hilda!" said Landor. "I'm almost afraid of you."

"Then why didn't you leave me to the others—they were not afraid of me."

He pressed her arm close, and drew her against him.

"I don't intend ever to leave you to another," he said.

"Indeed! do you intend to abduct me?"

"I do—legally."

"Then catch me!" she laughed, and sprang down the stairs and through the billiard-room window into the garden, with him in close pursuit.

She managed that he overtook her in an arbor, where the moonlight paused outside; but when he caught her, and would have kissed her, she laid her hand smartly across his face, and twisted away.

"There!" she said, dropping on a bench, "don't be so impertinent!" She put out her hand. "Now, come and sit beside me, and be good—not so close beside me, or you can't be good. You are amazingly presumptuous—ordinarily, you behave very well, indeed. What has come over you, to-night?"

"You!" he said, sweeping her with a comprehensive glance. "You, and that devilish costume. Do you take me for a wooden Indian?"

"I took you for a particularly well-mannered man!" she laughed.

"But not a blind one?"

"No—no—not blind!—else I had not worn this gown—stay where you are! if you come nearer, I shall go back to the house, or out into the brightest spot of moonlight I can find."

"But I've got something to tell you, Hilda."

"Tell it!"

"I can't, so far away."

"I can hear you perfectly.—No! stay there, I say."

She saw that the declaration was imminent, and, for a little while longer, she played him. It was delicious to worry him, knowing that she had him securely hooked. When she wearied, and was ready for the finale, she arose.

"Let us go in and dance," she said. "You have tormented me enough for one evening."

"I!" he laughed. Then he stepped in front of her—as she had meant he should—and seized her hands, also as she had meant.

"You know perfectly well, dear, what I have been trying to tell you," he said, his voice tuned to just the proper tone of sentimental intensity.

"No," she said archly—"No, I don't. What is it?"

He drew her gently back to the seat.

"Will you marry me, Hilda?" he asked.

"Marry you?" she echoed, as though astonished. "Marry you? Do you mean you love me?"

He raised her hands, and kissed the pretty, slender fingers.

"Surely, dear," he said, "you must know that I love you—have loved you these many, many months."

She laughed derisively, and flung aside his hands with a motion of vehement disgust.

"Love me!" she mocked. "Love me! Yes,

ardently, overpoweringly, so much of me as my fortune, and my assured position in society. More than that——!" With a contemptuous shrug, she sprang up, and made to go by him.

He blocked the way; his brain refused to credit his ears and eyes. It was simply impossible!—she could not be serious!—the girl was in love with him, as certain as——

"Will you be good enough to let me pass," she said, sharply.

"No!" he exclaimed, catching her by the wrist, "no, Hilda, I won't! You can't mean what you say!—surely, you are jesting!—you must know I love *you—you*——"

"Spare your lies!" she broke in—"and release me. If you do not, I shall call for help.—Thank you!—now, stand aside."

"You have deliberately led me on for this?" he demanded, grasping, at last, that she really was in earnest.

"I have!" she laughed. "I have, indeed.—Should you like to know the reason?"

"If I may," he said, humbly.

He could not imagine what she had against him, what he had done; and there was the chance that he could explain it away, and catch her on the recoil, when her woman's heart softened in remorse for her injustice. For that she had loved him, once, he was well assured. And therein he was right.

"You may—and gladly!" she replied. "Do

"NO!" HE EXCLAIMED; "NO, HILDA, I WON'T."

you remember a certain Saturday night, down at the Heights, a few weeks ago—when the grille-room was celebrating a golf victory, and you were among a crowd of garrulous men at one of the big tables? If you do, you will recall that some of you were so forgetful of propriety, as to bring women into your talk—reputable women, I mean. I was one of the women; brought in by *you*. Some one asked why you didn't marry, and you replied:—'I could marry to-morrow. The Gordon girl is so crazy about me, I have only to whistle—and she even will pay the parson. I'm about ready to whistle, too—those millions look pretty good to me.'"

He clenched back an oath. It was the one time in his two years at Northumberland, that he had let himself indulge beyond the line of loosened tongue. And now, it had come back upon him with fatal judgment. Yet he still could lie—and no clubman would admit having babbled.

"Surely, Hilda, you can't believe so shameful a thing of me!" he said, with hurt surprise. "Some one has been deliberately trying to break up our——"

She cut him short, with a jeering laugh.

"Save your conscience, if you have one!" she exclaimed. "I know, as well as you, that Club doings must never pass the club-house doors; but they do—this of yours did; I have taken the trouble to verify it beyond all question.—You have

whistled, Mr. Landor—how do the millions look to you, now?"

"Pretty sad!" he answered.

The game was up, and he was not of the sort to whine uselessly—nor to let her see that she had touched him.

"It will look sadder still when this tale gets back to Northumberland," she retorted. "Here, I shall tell it myself, to-morrow at luncheon. Whether you remain to hear it, is for you to determine."

She turned on her heel, and left him.

Landor waited a few moments, then went slowly back to the house. What to do now! The refusal was so unexpected, and he had been so absolutely confident, that his mind was slow in adjusting itself to the sudden change.

In the hall, William met him with a telegram. He tore it open; it was from his office, and in cipher. Ordinarily, he could have read it, or enough, at least, to gather the general meaning, but now there was not one familiar word. He went up to his room, and, from the code, wrote out the translation.

"Warrant issued this evening. Officer starts to-night for Egerton to serve it."

And his last chance to obtain the money had just failed him!

For a long while, he sat at the desk, twisting and untwisting the yellow sheet—thinking, scheming,

planning—the way out—the way out! And always the same conclusion:—there was no way, save in flight.

At length, he slowly tore the telegram and its translation into fragments, and dropped them in the waste-basket. From his bag, he took a bundle of time-tables and a steamship guide. The point, now, was to get away, and disappear; later—when the search had subsided—he could drift over to some quiet seaport, and slip off to foreign parts. Of course, if he could find a likely means to leave the country immediately, so much the better.

In the midst of his calculations, he suddenly flung down his pencil, and sat up sharply.

"By the Lord, there *is* another chance!" he exclaimed. "This time, my dear wife, I fancy you will think a bit before you refuse. . . . . Yet, you're a stubborn fool, so I best prepare my route."

He took up the pencil, and went back to maps and schedules.

XVIII

THE BREAKING OF THE BALL

When Harwood went for Mildred, there were others than Wilberforce on guard; and, at last, to displace them, he exerted the host's privilege, and bore her off for a dance, despite their protests that she had refused them all.

"You are a very masterful sort of man!" she smiled—"do you know it?"

"Is it masterful to take what belongs to one?" he asked.

"It depends entirely on how it is done. You almost picked me up, and carried me away."

"I should have liked nothing better!"—He glanced quickly around——

"No, you don't!" she exclaimed, and sped out into the moonlight, and into view of the crowd near the house. "Moreover," (leaning close to him, now) "I'm not yours, sweetheart—yet."

What he would have answered was prevented by Judge Casson, who came upon them from a side path.

"Ah, Colleton, I was searching for you," he said. "If you will excuse me, I shall slip off home presently. I'm sorry to miss the Reel, but I'm afraid my head would not permit." He held out a hand to each. "I'll make my farewells now, and

not bother you later. What do you think of our Continental, Mrs. Gascoyne? Worthy of Captain Beverly, himself, is he not! Good-night—good-night!"

"I love Judge Casson!" said Mildred. "I'm a stranger, and yet he has been the best friend I've ever had, in all my life."

"He is a rare old man," Harwood agreed. "He belongs to the generation before his own—when personal honor, and loyalty to friend, even to death, were the cardinal obligations of a gentleman." . . . .

"Did you really want to dance with me, Colleton?" she asked, when, the waltz ended, they returned to the garden. "Because, if you did, I should never have suspected it. Saint Anthony himself couldn't have been more circumspect. Positively, you kept me so far off, I might quite as well have been alone."

"I did it to save you from the dowagers and gossips," he explained.

"Oh!—well, I'm grateful for your consideration," she said, naïvely; "though I really don't think that even dowagers or gossips would have criticised your holding me a trifle closer."

"I'll atone for it, in a minute!" he laughed.

"No," said she, "you'll not. I shall confine you to the same discretion the rest of the evening; it may improve your conduct hereafter."

Little negro page-boys, in suits of white duck,

were flitting through the garden, summoning everyone to supper.

"Ought you not go back?" she asked. "They will want to propose your health."

"Just so! and I don't intend to be put to a speech. They will forget all about me in a few minutes—as soon as the champagne gets in its work. Moreover, we shall now have the place to ourselves, for a little while."

He led her to the seat under the rose-tree, in the far corner near the wall, where he had met her, that first afternoon.

"This is the Place of the Fourth Dimension," he said; "here we are invisible to mortals. Now, talk to me, little one, while I look at you and delight."

"Then sit at the opposite end of the bench," she ordered. "So—and stay there. . . . . Landor came for another talk. He tried to drive Mr. Wilberforce away, and even appealed meaningly to me to intervene for him; I refused blankly, and, in a foolish moment, added that I was promised to you, until the breaking of the Ball."

"Bully!" said Harwood. "How did he take it?"

"With a pleasant smile, and a nasty, covert insinuation about you, that I only could understand. —Don't bother, dear; it rather pleased me, indeed; otherwise, I shouldn't have mentioned it.—Should you be much surprised, if I told you that he will propose to Miss Gordon to-night?"

"What!—*marriage?*"

"Yes, marriage. The man is in desperate need of money. His haste and methods prove it. I even taunted him with being in danger of arrest—and with having made love to Miss Gordon, to obtain cash through her. And he didn't deny it."

"But he can't marry her!" Harwood objected.

"No—but he can affiance her, and raise money on credit of her millions, or persuade her to give it to him. The latter will be his purpose."

"It's monstrous! And the girl is fascinated by him. It is she who had him included in the party. Well, I never meddle in others' affairs, but now is the exception!" striking the iron tea-table, beside the bench. "I shall warn her, to-morrow. It's a pity it isn't the real Captain Beverly who is in his uniform. He could take this scoundrel out into a patch of moonlight, behind the wall, and run him through, under the code."

"And who should I be, dear, if you were the Captain?" she laughed divertingly. She was in constant fear of an encounter between the two men. She knew that both were not slow to anger.

"Betty Colleton!—as you are going to be, some day soon."

"And is that the Captain's sword?" she asked.—"Let me look at it?"

He drew out the slender blade, watching her with smiling eyes, as she examined the hand-wrought silver hilt and guard, and sent the moonlight shim-

mering along the polished steel—as bright, now, as the day it flashed in the bride's salute, at Fairlawn Hall on the Cooper.

"I love the men's dress of Colonial days," she said. "The powdered hair—the ribbon at neck—the silks, the satins, the damask—the small clothes—the swords! Don't you wish they still obtained?"

"I don't! I've got trouble enough, as it is. What if I had to decide, every night, among a blue coat and a gray waistcoat and white breeches, or a gray coat and white waistcoat and blue breeches, or a red coat and yellow waistcoat and lavender breeches, or a violet coat and—O Lord, think of it! Me for our one and always evening clothes."

"Oh, but the picturesqueness of the others, Colleton!"

"We leave that, now, to the women—they have enough competition to keep themselves unhappy, and totally obliterate the ninth commandment, without having the men mix in."

"Here! take your old sword!" she said; "though you don't deserve to wear it, even for an evening, much less to be Harwood of Fairlawn."

"And still less to be the prospective subject of the Lady-with-Titian-Hair," he smiled, taking the hilt, and her hand with it.

"Don't!" she said, "some one is coming."

"It's only William."

"Negro servants have not learned to be blind," she cautioned.

"Mr. Harwood, you are wanted on the telephone, at once, on important business," the butler announced.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know, sir, he wouldn't give his name!"

"What is his business?"

"He refused to say, sir."

"Then tell him to go to the devil, with my compliments."

"Yes, sir, I'll do it, sir!" with a wide grin.

"Wouldn't you better answer, Colleton?" said Mildred. "Down here, it isn't the custom to give names to servants—you may offend some one mortally with that message."

"All right, sweetheart, if you wish—you will wait for me?"

She nodded. Laying the sword on the table, (quite forgetting the scabbard by his side) he sprang away after William.

He went up the stairs, to answer the telephone in the quiet of his apartment. Landor, just coming from his own room, the route planned and scheduled, drew quickly back, and waited until Harwood's door had shut. Then he hurried down. The butler was in the hall.

"Do you know where Mrs. Gascoyne is?" Landor asked.

"No, sir! I haven't seen her since she came."

As a ready liar, William had all the facility of his race, and with an education to direct it into

proper and expedient use. As Mildred had said, he was not blind—better, he was discreet and thoughtful.

But a babbling guest, who overheard, put it all for naught.

"I saw Mrs. Gascoyne go into the garden with Mr. Harwood, just before supper," was the information.

And Landor, with a most gracious smile of thanks, hurried out. She was alone!—waiting for Harwood. Now, was his opportunity.

He went at once to the rear of the garden; and chance led him straight to Mildred, who, preoccupied, eyes half closed, did not observe him until he was beside her. She stared at him ignoringly a moment, and turned away. Landor only smiled.

"I have come to give you a last chance," he said, curtly.

"It was quite unnecessary," she shrugged.

"That is for you to consider, my dear wife.—Ah, you don't fancy the title, I see; so you may be very willing to consider, whether you wish to be the wife of a convict."

"You mean, you are a thief——"

"Embezzler, please; it's more fashionable, and not so vulgar."

"And unless I give you the money for restitution, you will be arrested and punished, like any other common criminal?"

"Just that, my dear."

"And Miss Gordon, failed you?"

"Frankly, yes!"

"I'm delighted!" said Mildred. "Now, you're sure for prison."

"You mean you refuse?"

"Undoubtedly! I would not give you so much as a farthing to save you from the hangman."

"Doubtless not!" he sneered, anger showing for the first time; "it would open the way for Harwood—if he wanted you then.—You love him?"

"I do."

"Well, if you are obdurate, my dear Mildred, I'll make it even less likely that he will want the embezzler's wife, save for a mistress—as now, is it?"

She sprang up.—He reached forward, and pushed her back to her place—then stood directly in front, and close.

"Listen!" he said sternly. "You want to marry Harwood—if you can make him want it, too, so much the better for you. Give me the money, fifty thousand will suffice, and I'll engage to aid you to divorce me. Refuse—and I'll fight even from prison, and so damn you that, in very obligation to his name and manhood, he dare not take you, however much he wish. Choose—will you lose Harwood, for a little revenge on me?"

"Neither!" she retorted. "Mr. Harwood knows I am your wife, and all the rest of the wretched tale; also, that prison waits for you. We

speed you to it, as your proper residence, and as a further ground for divorce. Now, you have your answer; be good enough to be gone."

"Damn you!" he said, catching her by her shoulders, and shaking her with enraged violence—his strong fingers sinking deep into the soft flesh. "I've a mind to——"

She twisted loose, and, springing up, struck him in the face with all her strength, the rings cutting across the cheek-bone, to the blood.

"You infernal devil!" he exclaimed, seizing her from behind, as she passed, and drawing her back against him. "I've a notion to choke the life out of you."

Shifting his right hand from her waist, he gripped her by the throat. She broke the hold, but he wound both his arms across her breast, pinioning hers tight to her sides.

"No, I'll not choke you!" he muttered. "There is a sweeter revenge, and one that brings *me* no punishment."

He put his head close to the gleaming hair, and whispered in her ear.

For a few instants, the struggle was terrific—then, with a taunting chuckle, he began to drag her slowly toward the arbor. She had not called for aid, because she did not wish to be found with him; now, she had no power to call, the fight and the fierce constriction of his arms, had left her gasping. She felt that she was growing helpless.

She ceased to contend—her eyes closed, her head sank over, her body relaxed to limpness.

He fell into the trap:—she had fainted. He loosed his hold, and caught her up to carry.

At once, her wild cry for help rang through the garden. But only once—his fingers closed on her throat.—And, now, her faint was not assumed.

No one, at the house, heard the cry—all were indoors—save Harwood, himself, who, hurrying back, was just crossing the rear piazza. He recognized the voice, instantly, and sprang for the stairs, tripped on his scabbard, and plunged to the bottom.

Fifteen feet, down granite steps to flag-stones, is no soft flight for even a strong man. Harwood lay, a moment, dazed and shaken. Then he leaped up, and, staggering uncertainly at first, ran on. There had been no second cry, and none met him as he sped the hundred and fifty yards of the garden's depth. That call for help could have but one meaning: Landor—but what! what!

He dashed around the hedge into the open space before the rose-tree—and stopped, aghast!

On the turf near the iron tea-table, in the bright moonlight, lay Henry Landor, Beverly Harwood's slender, silver-hilted sword transfixing his throat—blood on face and flowing collar. A few feet beyond, pale and motionless, lay Mildred Gascoyne.

With a cry of bitterness, Harwood sprang across and gathered her into his arms. Her breath

touched his cheek—her heart beat to his hand. She was not dead! He bore her to the bench—no blood stained her gown in front—nor rear!—nor anywhere! nor mark of injury!—nothing save unconsciousness. She was unharmed.

He went over to Landor. No pulse—no breath—no heart-beat.—Death!

Returning to Mildred, he brought water from the lily-pool, nearby, and bathed her face, and wrists, and throat where Landor's fingers marked it. He did not summon aid. He preferred to do the service himself; and until she were conscious and could tell the story, it were well no stranger should intrude. With Landor dead, no one, now, need ever know that he was her husband.

In a little while, her breathing strengthened—her cheeks came faintly pink—her eyelids fluttered—opened, bewildered and staring—then, with a soft sigh, she looked up at him, and smiled.

"Colleton!" she said, faintly—"Thank God!"

"Yes, sweetheart," he said, standing so she could not see the body on the turf. "You feel better, now?"

"Much better. It was very silly to faint. Where is he?"

"Patience, dear," Harwood smiled. "I'll tell you presently—when you can walk back to the house."

She sat up, suddenly, then clutched him, as her head reeled, drawing him a bit aside.

"What is *that?*" she exclaimed, staring at the dead man—"Landor! Landor! My God, Colleton! did you kill him?"

"No, dear, I didn't kill him," he said soothingly, and hiding his own wonder. "He was dead when I came; you were lying, yonder."

"*There!*—when I fainted, I was in his arms!"

"Suicide?" Harwood suggested.

"What else could it be?" A little while, she gazed calmly at the corpse; then she looked up at Harwood. "Now, the secret is safe!" she said.

"Yes—and come what may, when the law takes hold here, the secret must never come out."

"Your pardon, sir," came a strange voice just behind them, "I'm looking for Mr. Harwood, could you——"

"I'm Mr. Harwood," said Colleton.

The man saluted, and drew back his coat, disclosing an officer's shield.

"You have as one of your guests, I believe, a Henry Landor. He is wanted in Northumberland for embezzlement. I have a process to detain him until the arrival of the warrant, to-morrow. I don't wish to disturb your entertainment;—that's why I came by the rear—so, if you can manage it, I'll take him out, quietly, the same way."

Stepping aside, Harwood motioned to the figure on the turf, beyond the table.

"Henry Landor lies yonder," he said. "You are a few minutes too late."

The officer went quickly over and knelt beside the corpse, but laying no hand upon it. Once, he turned and looked sharply at Mildred, and then at Harwood. When he arose, his eyes went straight to the empty scabbard by the latter's side.

"Does the sword belong *there?*" he asked.

"Yes!" Harwood answered—and, for the first time, the accusation of the situation struck him. "My Lord, man, you don't think I killed him?"

"The affair is not within my orders, sir—so I'm not called upon to think. But if you will be advised, by one who has had some experience, you will leave everything exactly as it is, summon the police and coroner at once—and then, let your attorney do the talking. If you wish, sir, I'll remain, here, on guard, until some one in authority arrives."

"Thank you, officer," said Harwood. "I'll do exactly as you suggest. Don't leave here, however, until I see you again.—Can you walk to the house, Mildred?"

"It is absurd to intimate that you killed Landor!" she exclaimed, as soon as they were out of ear-shot. "No one would imagine it for an instant."

"Yes, of course, it's absurd, dear," he encouraged.

But, for himself, he knew that it was not absurd—every objective circumstance pointed to his guilt; every link was there, except an adequate motive.

Let it be known that she were Landor's wife, and the chain was complete.

As they approached the house, Mrs. Leicester and Fordyce were coming down the steps. Harwood halted and hailed them.

"Be guided by what I say, dear!" he cautioned, hastily. . . . . "Evelyn, I want you to accompany Mrs. Gascoyne to The Oaks, and remain the night. There is serious trouble, here—she will explain. Don't ask questions; go immediately, don't even wait to change your costume. Your maid will know what you require, and I'll despatch her at once. Take the car, it's in front, and then send it back instantly. I need Fordyce, myself. You understand?—Good-night, dear!" with a smile, and a touch of hand to Mildred's cheek. "Don't be perturbed. We'll have this straightened out in a few hours.—Go by the basement passage; it's the shortest way. . . . . Fordyce, Mr. Landor, one of the house-guests, has just died. Will you please announce it to the company—of course, they will understand that the Ball is over. Then come to my room, immediately—bring Judge Casson, if he is still here; he said good-night, before supper, saying he was going home in a few minutes."

Harwood gained his room by the rear stairway; Fordyce joined him, speedily, but alone; the Judge had gone.

"Well, no matter!" said Colleton; "you are the Harwood counsel, too. As you have doubtless

surmised, there has been a tragedy. Landor was killed—by a sword-thrust through the neck."

"Suicide, accident, or murder?" said Fordyce, with the calm placidity of the trial lawyer.

"I don't know!"

He related, quickly, what he himself had seen and done. In the midst of it, Fordyce went over and pushed the bell, hard and repeatedly.

"William, give Doctor Dubose Mr. Harwood's compliments, and ask him to be good enough to step here at once," he said. "If he has gone, send after him instantly. . . . . Dubose is the coroner, and we are lucky to have him to deal with. It is the one office, in the county, which no one wants,—there isn't any money in it—so it usually goes to a gentleman. I'm sorry I can't say the same for Schwartz, the District Attorney.—Ah, Coroner, there is work for you. Mr. Landor's death was due to violence; his own or another's. The body lies at the foot of the garden, just as when Mr. Harwood found it. I suggest you empanel a jury from those still here, and view it, immediately, so it can be removed to the house.—And, Dick, be careful to select those who won't be influenced by Schwartz. This may be a rather serious case. When you're ready, let us know. Meanwhile, I'll telephone the District Attorney, and Harwood will send the car for him. And, also, old man, don't take any testimony to-night—adjourn the inquest until to-morrow afternoon.—Will you do it?"

"I most assuredly will!—or anything else you ask, in half reason," said Dubose. "And rest easy as to the jury."

When he had gone, Fordyce got the District Attorney, at his residence, and told him briefly the situation. Then he turned briskly to his host.

"Mr. Harwood," he said, "the first duty of a client is to be absolutely frank with his lawyer. You have not told me all you know. I say candidly that the facts, down in the garden, point straight at you, and your story only strengthens them. Unfortunately for us, Schwartz is a low-born, blatant demagogue, vindictive and unprincipled, who violently hates our class, and had a personal grudge against your cousin and predecessor, for some real or fancied wrong; but mainly, I think, because he never was received here. I know he has announced that he would 'get even with that damn Harwood bunch.' Here, now, is his opportunity—to order your arrest for killing Henry Landor. Don't imagine I suspect you; but if you want me to fight back at him, with any immediate effect, you mustn't play into his hands by obliging me to work in the dark. Will you answer a few questions?"

"Yes," said Harwood, after a moment's reflection.

"Does Mrs. Gascoyne know who killed Landor?"

"No."

"Why did she faint?"

"From terror.—Landor came upon her, alone, and attacked her——"

"*You mean*——"

"Yes. She cried for help, and remembers nothing more. As I heard the cry, the killing must have occurred in the short interval it took me to get there from the house. The fall down the piazza steps didn't delay me over two minutes."

"Then it all happened within three minutes, certainly five, at the most," said Fordyce, with an uneasy shake of the head. "The inferences are unfortunate. I wish to Heaven you hadn't heard the cry,—or that you had put the infernal sword back in its scabbard instead of on the table. The only point in your favor is an absence of motive—why should you kill one of your own house-party?" He looked steadily at Harwood, but the latter made no comment. Then the summons came from Dr. Dubose.

Weird almost to the grotesque was the fulfilment of this ancient formality of the Law. Midnight!—On the turf, under the bright moonlight, the stark figure in doublet and hose of black, blood on face and breast, a sword blade through the throat. Close around, a Prince of the Church in robes of scarlet, a gay courtier of the Grand Monarch, a priest in sable cassock, a dandy of Brummel's day, a pirate in red and black, two gentlemen in perukes and small clothes. A little to the side, a cluster of others in costume—the men of the house-party.

The Cardinal knelt beside the body, and examined the wound, carefully.

"It is directly through the carotid artery," he said. "Death must have been practically instantaneous."

"Might it have been self-inflicted?" Fordyce asked.

"Yes—but not likely; it would have been very difficult for him to plunge the sword hard enough with his hands, to drive it so deep—the hilt is too far away. With a knife, it would be easier. Yet he could have held the point against his neck, and have fallen on it."

"With relation to the position and character of the actual wound, however," Fordyce persisted, "is there anything to indicate that it was not self inflicted?"

"Absolutely nothing."

The motor called from the avenue; immediately William appeared escorting the District Attorney.

Schwartz was big, pompous, low-waisted, thin-lipped, shifty-eyed, exuding self-importance, narrow-mindedness and malice. He came, now, with the air of being preceded by a band and an escort of honor. He nodded carelessly to Fordyce, stared insolently at Harwood, and frowned around on the others. Then he surveyed the corpse.

"What is this—murder?" he demanded.

No one answered.

"You did well, indeed, not to disturb anything

until I arrived. Is there a doctor, here?—Ah, Dubose, I didn't recognize you in that get-up. You're the very one. Make a thorough examination of the body, then let it be removed to the house. I'll arrange for a jury to meet to-morrow and investigate."

"I have made the examination," said Dubose; "and the jury is in session, now,"—indicating them. "We were just about to adjourn, until two o'clock to-morrow, to hear testimony and determine on a verdict."

Schwartz straightened up, threw out his chest, and glared.

"Indeed, Mr. Coroner! and where, may I ask, does the District Attorney come in?"

"Wherever he cares to come in!" retorted Dubose. "We shall reassemble in some convenient room in the court-house at two o'clock." He stooped, gently drew out the sword, and handed it to the District Attorney. "Now, gentlemen, will you help to bear Mr. Landor within."

"Just a moment!" said Schwartz. "I should like to ask a few questions. Who wore this sword—the deceased?"

"It belongs to Mr. Harwood," responded Fordyce—"he wore it to-night, as part of his costume."

"O-h! Then, doubtless, he can inform us just how it got from the scabbard into the dead man's throat."

"Do you mean to insinuate that Mr. Harwood killed his guest?"

"My dear sir, the facts themselves make the insinuation. It is up to him to explain."

"All Mr. Harwood knows," said Fordyce, calmly, "is that he left the sword lying on this table, when suddenly called to the house—a short time thereafter, when he returned for it, he found it as you saw."

"Did he leave Mr. Landor here, when he went to the house?"

"He did not."

"Of course not!" Schwartz sneered. "And you would have me believe that Landor happened along, and, seeing a sword so convenient, was moved to stick a foot of it through his throat!"

"I would have the Commonwealth's Attorney act judicially, as becomes his office."

"Which he is doing, and shall do, sir—without fear or favor. A Harwood deserves and receives no more indulgence at my hands, than the humblest citizen of our county. It is my proud boast, sir—I would have you, and all these friends of yours, understand—that I——"

"Mr. Coroner," broke in Fordyce, "I suggest the propriety of immediately removing the body. We are in for a stump speech, which, the learned gentleman does not seem to appreciate, is scarcely befitting the presence of death."

Schwartz had been left suspended in the middle

of his most impressive gesture. His arm dropped slowly, and his tongue went still—for once in his life, he was abashed. In silence, he watched them lay Landor on a cloak, and bear him away toward the house.

"I have remained, sir," said Fordyce, "to inform you that had you handled this matter as an honest official, you would have found Mr. Harwood ready and anxious to assist you. Instead, however, you intend to use it as a means to vent a petty spite. Consequently, you may expect no aid from us; and Mr. Harwood will speak only through me." He raised his hand to the Northumberland detective, who, when relieved of his guard by the arrival of the Coroner, had drawn back in the shadow. "Come with us, sir!" he called.

"Who are *you?*" Schwartz demanded. "You don't belong in Egerton.—What do you know concerning this murder?"

But the stranger simply smiled, and passed on.

"I beg your pardon, sir, Mr. Fordyce," he said, "but might I be permitted to ask a question?—Why did you make the District Attorney mad, when he was already hard enough against Mr. Harwood? You had a reason, for you did it on purpose, but it's a new play to me."

"You are rather observing," Fordyce commented. "I did it for this reason. It was perfectly evident, to one who knows Schwartz, that he had picked on Mr. Harwood as the criminal; so I

wanted to anger him into having the arrest made at once—early in the morning, I trust. Then I can immediately apply to the Court for release on bail, and catch the District Attorney, with only the flimsiest sort of evidence. About all he has now, is the sword—he doesn't know even what you do. If I gave him another day, he would patch up something stronger; for, even if he knew that Mr. Harwood were not implicated, nevertheless, actuated by a personal grudge, he would endeavor to humiliate him by imprisonment, pending trial.—I don't know why I should tell you this, save that from your manner when you came upon Mr. Harwood, we both feel that you believe him innocent."

"I sure do—if he acted like a man who has just killed another, then my twenty years on the force are no good."

"We may need your testimony, if the case ever come to trial," said Fordyce.

"You will have it mighty ready, sir. I'll be glad to help you upset that barker you've got for District Attorney!"

And so, Fordyce made sure of the only witness who had seen Mrs. Gascoyne and Harwood together beside the corpse, and who, if ill-disposed, could—by his manner or intonation in telling even the actual facts—be most damaging to the defendant.

XIX

AN ORDER AND A TOAST

Fordyce had measured Schwartz perfectly. Before ten o'clock, Egerton was in the throes of a sensation such as it had never experienced, save only in the battle-days.

There had been murder at Fairlawn Hall! Its Master stood charged with the crime! The prosecution had been directed by the District Attorney, himself, and the county detective was, even then, gone to serve the warrant!

Already, all the loafers in town had congregated on the street before Justice Zell's office, awaiting the coming of the defendant. The sentiment was unanimous that the killing had occurred in a fight over one of the women, and about equally divided as to its justification. Suddenly, around the corner, shot the big, red Mercedes, they all knew; Harwood and Fordyce alighted, and disappeared into the magistrate's office.

The District Attorney was with Zell, in the inner room. Fordyce walked straight in.

"I understand, Squire, you have issued a warrant for Mr. Harwood," he said, pleasantly.

"He has," Schwartz responded. "I deemed it my solemn duty, sir, to——"

"Oh, you and your duty be damned!" Fordyce

exclaimed. "I was addressing the Justice.—Mr. Harwood is here, voluntarily, Squire, to meet the warrant, and to ask that the hearing, instead of being held immediately, be postponed a week. We are not ready."

Schwartz walked into the trap.

"It can't be done!" he announced, grandiloquently. "The Commonwealth, so long as I have the honor to represent it, proposes to show no favors even to a Harwood. The hearing is fixed for now, and, if it please the Justice, I insist that it proceed forthwith. The case is so plain that one witness would be quite sufficient, but I'll call two. I'll have them here, in a moment."

It pleased the Squire, as Fordyce knew it would, to do whatever the District Attorney wished. Zell was a dispenser of justice according to cash in it for him, and Schwartz gave him all the criminal business, possible. Fordyce fought a bit longer, for effect, then subsided with a sarcastic protest.

The testimony was purely perfunctory. Schwartz put two of the Coroner's jury on the stand, and proved by them the death of Landor, the sword in his neck, the admission of the defendant, that the weapon was a portion of his own costume that evening, that he had left it on the table at the scene of the crime, and then had been the first, a few minutes later, to discover the body.

Whereupon, Zell—against Fordyce's vigorous objection that the testimony was absurdly insuffi-

cient to hold anyone for murder—promptly committed the defendant to jail, to await the action of the Court; at the same time expressing his regret that, under the law, he had " no power to admit him to bail."

Then he made out the formal instrument, consigning the body of one Colleton Harwood to the care and custody of the High Sheriff of the County, and gave it to the waiting Constable. Meanwhile, Fordyce had gone to the door, beckoned to a rather handsome young man, on the opposite side of the street, who came quickly across.

" Your services won't be required, Mr. Constable," said Fordyce. " Out of consideration for Mr. Harwood, and to save him from the humiliation of jail, and further indignity at the hands of the very honorable District Attorney and the equally honorable Justice Zell, Sheriff Marix has come here to receive him."

" There's your receipt, Schneider," said the Sheriff, tossing it, already prepared, on the table.— " How are you, Mr. Harwood! This is an outrage, sir, and I'm happy to do you any service I can. I'm only sorry, it's not that pair, yonder, I'm getting instead of you—though they'll be along some day.—What next, Mr. Fordyce; straight to court? "

It was not until then, that Schwartz had a suspicion of the snare into which he had been led. He turned upon Fordyce, angrily.

"Ah! you're growing wise, are you!" the latter laughed. "Did you imagine that I would suffer you to put Mr. Harwood in jail, even for an hour! Here," drawing a blue-backed legal paper from his pocket, "is the notice of our intention to apply, forthwith, for release on bail.—Now, Mr. Sheriff, if you are ready, we will proceed."

Marix shook his head. "You two go on; I'll walk; nobody need know Mr. Harwood is under arrest; see?"

Colleton put out his hand. "You are mighty kind," he said; "but I don't mind in the least. Come along with us."

But Marix refused, and stood in the doorway until they had entered the car; then he sauntered slowly to the court-house; where, at the stair-way in the rear hall, Fordyce and Harwood awaited him.

They entered the court-room through the door beside the Bench, leading immediately into the Bar. The buzz, which went up from the spectators, was so sudden and so loud that the President Judge—lean-faced, sandy-haired, cold blue-eyed—rapped his desk sharply for silence, and glanced around for the cause. When he saw Harwood, he understood. He gave him a faint smile and nod of recognition, and went on with the matter in hand.

Colleton had met Judge Charlesworth at the Casson dinner, and at the Ball, the previous evening, but the two other men on the Bench he had

never seen. Charlesworth looked like a judge; they did not, and he remarked as much to Fordyce.

"You're very right!" returned the latter. "They are ordinary laymen, and pretty ordinary, at that. They know no more law than a cobble-stone, and are as useless as an eighty-seventh wheel to a wagon. The Constitution of this State inflicts them upon some few counties."

"I'm quite content to rest my case with Judge Charlesworth," said Harwood, "but I distrust the laymen; they may overrule him."

"No danger, old man. A pair of them, in another county, tried that some years ago, and the Supreme Court promptly labeled them, 'the one associate and his fellow *ass*.' Charlesworth will decide your case, and I don't know a better lawyer."

The argument that had been in process was concluded; the Court gave his ruling instantly and straight to the point.

"Is there any further business, gentlemen?" he asked. Then his eyes turned, inquiringly, to Fordyce.

The latter arose, and went to the counsel-table.

"May it please Your Honor!" he said. "You were at Fairlawn Hall, last night, and are aware of the distressing incident which terminated the Ball—the death, apparently by violence, of one of the house-guests, Mr. Henry Landor; whose body was found at the foot of the great garden, with a

sword-thrust through the throat. This morning, by express order of the learned District Attorney, an information was laid before Justice Zell charging Mr. Harwood with the murder. Being apprised of the astonishing action, he did not wait for the warrant to be served, but, with his counsel, immediately hastened before the magistrate, and surrendered. I moved a postponement of the hearing, for a few days—which, I submit, was only reasonable, in view of the sudden and unexpected arrest; and, further, because my partner, Judge Casson (who has always been the personal counsel of the Harwood family) is temporarily incapacitated for court work——"

"You never mentioned Judge Casson!" Schwartz broke in.

"Counsel will not interrupt!" the Court admonished, curtly.

"It is not material, of course, Your Honor," Fordyce went on, "but I may be indulged to answer, simply for information, that the learned gentleman gave me no chance to mention it. He interrupted me (just, as now) saying that there could not be a postponement; and, as everyone is well aware, whatever the learned District Attorney says, is a Holy Writ to Justice Zell—as well *to do*, as not to do. My motion was forthwith denied, and the hearing had. The evidence was so pitifully insufficient, that I thought even the subsidized Mr. Zell would hesitate to follow orders, but I did him too much credit. He committed Mr. Harwood

to jail, as nonchalantly as one lights a cigar. Having anticipated just such arbitrary and unjudicial conduct, on the part of the two public officials in question, I had already prepared an application for bail, which I served on the learned District Attorney, with notice that it would be presented forthwith. The Sheriff, at my request, has the defendant here in Court. I see also the learned District Attorney is present. As he has a copy of the petition, I shall not, unless Your Honor so wish, consume time in reading it."—He handed it to the clerk, and sat down.

The remarks had caused a positive sensation. Among the Bar, because of the blunt statement of facts as to Schwartz and Zell—which all the lawyers knew, but had never cared to voice in open court; among the general public, because of the allegations themselves, which practically none of them had suspected, and the conclusive presumption of truth when made by one of Fordyce's position and popularity.

Judge Charlesworth had listened, with impassive countenance, and the Bar knew, when he did not interrupt instantly at the first irrelevancy, that it was because he considered the strictures well justified. At the end, he turned toward Schwartz, and nodded.

"Now, we will hear you, sir!" he said.

Schwartz arose, ran his fingers through his hair, threw out his chest, and prepared to go into action.

All that was required, to complete the illusion of a professional agitator preparing to erupt, was for him to remove his coat, take off a pair of dirty cuffs, and roll up his shirt sleeves.

"May it please Your Honors!" he boomed. "I have heard, with grieved surprise, the extraordinary remarks of my brother Fordyce. Of his unwarranted aspersions, touching myself and Justice Zell, I make no account. I shall treat them with the contemptuous silence they deserve. Justice Zell requires no defence at my hands. As for myself, I scorn his words and the insinuations therein contained. I try to do my duty, as, in my human finiteness, I judge it to be. Never, heretofore, have the honesty and purity of my motives been impeached, within the sacred precincts of this temple of Justice—nor elsewhere. I am sworn to show no favor in the execution of the heavy responsibilities of my office, as the Constitutional representative of our great and glorious Commonwealth for the preservation of its peace and dignity. It is my high purpose to administer the said office without regard to occupation, wealth, or social position—if there be such a thing as social position in the 'land of the free and home of the brave.' And, with the help of God, and a clean conscience, I shall——"

Judge Charlesworth had been glancing through the petition, now he suddenly laid it aside.

"Mr. Schwartz," he said, coldly, "how often must I admonish you, that stump speeches and

academic orations are not argument? Come to the matter at issue. What answer have you to this motion—do you resist the release of Mr. Harwood on bail?"

"I most assuredly and emphatically do."

"Why?"

"Because, Your Honor, the Commonwealth is not prepared. It asks——"

"You were prepared for the hearing at the committing magistrate's, less than an hour ago," the Judge interrupted. "Why shouldn't you be prepared, now?"

"Because, may it please the Court, I offered, there, only sufficient evidence to make out a *prima facie* case. If we are to go into the question of bail, I must have time to prepare, more carefully, the——"

"The defendant specifically alleges, that you did not make out a *prima facie* case. If this be true, he is illegally detained, and must be discharged from custody—or if your case, though sufficient in presumption, be very weak, it is proper to admit him to bail. To administer your office, 'without regard to occupation, wealth or social position,' is your duty, under the guidance of sound judgment; but it does not contemplate intolerance, nor arbitrariness, nor disregard of personal rights. The admitted facts of this case, considering the position of the defendant in this community, show such an immediate, well-nigh indecent haste in prosecution,

as to appeal to the prompt investigation by this Court. The motion is granted; and, all parties being present, the hearing will proceed forthwith. I will, however, allow the Commonwealth fifteen minutes, in which to procure the attendance of its witnesses."

With an air of protesting resignation, Schwartz sauntered over to the counsel-table, wrote several names on a slip of paper, motioned to the messenger, and gave it to him, with instructions to notify the gentlemen that the Court wanted them immediately.

"I am summoning such witnesses as should be within call," he said, addressing the Bench; "but I cannot be assured that any of them will be here, in the time allotted."

"That is the Commonwealth's affair, sir," the Judge replied. "You should have brought them with you from the magistrate's. You were aware of the nature of the petition."—Then he swung toward Fordyce, who had returned to Harwood. "Mr. Fordyce, you spoke of Judge Casson as being temporarily incapacitated for court work; we trust it is nothing more than a slight indisposition; nothing to occasion any concern."

"Your Honor is very kind," said Fordyce, "and Judge Casson will deeply appreciate your consideration. We do not anticipate anything of a permanently serious nature. During the hunt, yesterday, while among the pines of Buzzard Hill, he was

struck on the head, near the temple, by a heavy limb. It dazed him, and he seemed to suffer from it at intervals the rest of the day. He left the Ball, rather early, last night, telling Mr. Harwood that his head was bothering him considerably. When I got to town, several hours later, it happened that I went to our offices, instead of direct home. There I found him, dazed and queer. Doctor Dubose, who was with me, saw at once, that it was due to a slight concussion of the brain, just sufficient to produce an automatic reflex—a condition of subconsciousness where the brain does not functionate, and its action is entirely mechanical. There is a lapse of memory, of course; and all action is involuntary, and strictly along the line of constant habit. The injury seemed very slight, however; it should not continue more than a few days, at most; and it is liable to pass off any moment. Indeed, he appeared to be a shade more rational, this morning—and no effort was made to restrain him. He was in the office when——"

Judge Charlesworth raised his hand, warningly.

"He is coming up the main aisle, now!" he said.

Just inside the Bar, the old man halted and bowed respectfully to the Bench, as was the custom in the old days, and which he clung to, still. The Court acknowledged it with a formal inclination of the head. Fordyce had moved slowly across—it had not occurred to him that habit might lead his uncle here.

"Hello, sir!" he remarked, casually. "I thought you were busy in the office. I've disposed of all our matters. I was just going back to take up the McDougall case with you."

Judge Casson laughed, silently.

"I'm all right, again, my boy!" he said; "I came-to, suddenly, a short time ago. But now, what is this I hear! Colleton Harwood arrested for murder, and actually committed!"

"Yes," Fordyce answered. "Yes! the doings of that vindictive bounder Schwartz. I've got him on the run, however; Charlesworth is going to grant bail, perhaps discharge absolutely."

The old Judge went quickly to Harwood.

"My dear Colleton! I'm horribly distressed over this miserable mistake!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not in the least disturbed," said Harwood. "I've rather enjoyed seeing the Court and Fordyce tramping around on the District Attorney. Somehow, I *have* taken a dislike to him. And I assure you, no one, not even you, Judge, could have handled the case better than Fordyce. Of course, I didn't kill Landor, so I'm perfectly easy, however this matter of bail come out. It's no shame, to an innocent man, to be obliged to remain a few weeks in jail,—though rather tiresome and inconvenient."

"I like your nerve, boy, I like your nerve!" with a clap on the arm. "Now, Charles, what is the exact situation here?"

Fordyce explained in a few sentences. With a

nod, Judge Casson turned away, and walked before the Bench.

"We are glad, indeed, to see you, sir," said Judge Charlesworth.

Judge Casson bowed his thanks. "With permission of the Court," he said, "I desire to make a statement touching the matter now before it. Had I not been suddenly disabled the case would never have been instituted. Though, even as it is, I cannot imagine what possible justification exists for it. Colleton Harwood is no more implicated in this homicide than is Your Honor. It was *I*, who killed Henry Landor."

Judge Casson's voice was ever calm, and soft, and beautifully modulated, and never more so than in these few sentences, which in the intense silence, carried to the farthest corner of the room. Even Charlesworth, imperturbable and steady-nerved, was speechless with amazement. After a moment's pause, the Judge went on.

"It happened thus. The guests were in the Hall at supper. I had made my adieu to my host, a little while before, and, now, I went into the garden —Your Honor knows its extent—intending to slip out by the postern, unobserved. I chose a side path, though the place seemed quite deserted. As I neared the gate, I saw, in the bright moonlight nearby, Henry Landor struggling with a woman. The next instant, he swung her up and bore her off.—She gave one cry for help. Landor's

fingers closed on her throat. I was already almost upon them. He heard me; tossing her aside, he turned with a curse and sprang at me. I caught up a sword, that lay on the table beside the bench, and shot it forward. He struck it up with his left arm, but not far enough. I saw the slender blade pass into his neck and out behind. His very weight and impetus carried him upon me, and I went down under him, striking my head,—just where a tree hit me during the hunt, that morning—violently on the ground. I remember, dimly, scrambling to my feet, but, from that instant until a few minutes ago, my mind was entirely blank of the past. What I did—when I left the garden—how I got home—I have not the faintest idea. When I suddenly recovered, my first thought was of Landor. A word of inquiry to Fairlawn Hall, and the situation was disclosed. I hastened here, at once—to free Mr. Harwood, and to surrender myself to the Court."

"Who was the woman?" Schwartz demanded.

The old man turned on him, scornfully.

"Sir!" he said, "I did not recognize her?"

Then, with another bow to the Bench, he walked slowly to a chair, a bit apart, and sat down.

Again silence.

Presently, Judge Charlesworth glanced at the District Attorney.

"Have you any motion in this case?" he inquired.

And Schwartz, not being all fool, promptly asked that Harwood be discharged, forthwith.

"Mr. Fordyce," said the Court, "draw the order." Then he looked down at Judge Casson. The latter instantly arose.

"You have our sincere thanks, Judge Casson, for the facts as to the death of Henry Landor. In disclosing them to us, you have acted as an *amicus curiæ*, and strictly within the obligation of your oath as an Attorney. We see in these facts nothing which calls for punishment. You would have been wholly justified, *under the circumstances*, in killing him, intentionally; and were it to come before us, we should, of our own motion, so instruct the jury and direct your instant acquittal. That is all, sir." He signed the order Fordyce handed up, releasing Harwood. "Is there any further business, gentlemen?—Mr. Crier, adjourn the Court."

Three honor-guests sat at the Fairlawn board, that evening—the same who had sat there, that first evening, and in the same places. The house-party had not broken. Only one was gone—whither the written instructions, found in his pocket-book, directed. Nor was there any pretense of sorrow among those who remained. Why should there be? Rather, was it for happiness and cheer, that their host was with them, free and guiltless, and the mystery cleared. Yet no one

spoke of it—even the Ball was ignored. It was as the reunion of old friends, long separated.

The impassive Fordyce was tumultuously merry. Evelyn Leicester was lavish with the soft, side-long glances of her splendid eyes. Judge Casson cast aside the burden of a death—though, in truth, it did not lie very heavily upon him—and mellowed into the suave, delightful gentleman, of another day; Wilberforce dropped the sting from his tongue, and sought only to be kind. Harwood, alone, seemed as always, calm, self-contained; showing, not at all, the intense happiness in his heart, save in his eyes, when they rested on the lovely, ruddy-haired woman by his side. Yet what could even he, who alone was aware of the truth, know of the joy and peace, which filled her soul?

"It seems beyond belief—that I am really free!" she said, softly, after a silence.

"Free, sweetheart!" he answered. "And no one knows—nor ever shall—of him."

In a spirit of mischief, she was carrying the Highland snuff-box, that evening, using it for her powder-puff. It lay beside her plate.

Taking it up, he scratched a word in Greek, and a date, on the inner side of the lid.

"Will you?" he asked, passing it to her.

She glanced at it, and a faint pink stole into face and neck.

"Yes, Colleton, if you wish," she answered;—"but isn't it very soon?"

He laughed softly, and shook his head. Then he arose, and raised his glass.

"My friends!" he said, taking Mildred by the hand and drawing her up beside him. "I ask you to drink with me to—The next Mistress of Fairlawn Hall."

With a shout, they were up, and the toast echoed back from every throat.

"Break them!" cried the Judge.

As one, the glasses shattered in fragments on the floor.

Fordyce bent over Evelyn Leicester, and spoke. She smiled, but shook her head.

"No, dear," she said, "no!—*not to-night.*"

FINIS

THE DASHING NOVEL

THE COLONEL OF THE RED HUZZARS

By

JOHN REED SCOTT

Stirring adventures, courtly intrigue, and fencing both of sword and wit, fill the pages of this story. The plot is built upon a wager between Major Dalberg, U. S. A., and a friend that within a certain time both would be dining with the king and dancing with the princess royal of Valeria. Strangely enough, Dalberg proves to be of the blood royal of Valeria, is reinstated into his ancestral rights, and when matters are about to reach a climax, the pretender steps in, and there ensues an encounter between American pluck and unscrupulous cleverness.

"There's not a dull page in it."—*The Index*, *Pittsburg*.

"A slap-dashing vacation-day romance."—*Evening Sun*, *New York*.

"So naïvely fresh in its handling, so plausible through its naturalness, that it comes like a mountain breeze across the far-spreading desert of similar romances."—*Gazette-Times*, *Pittsburg*.

Illustrations in Colors by CLARENCE F. UNDERWOOD

12mo. Decorated cloth, $1.50

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY Philadelphia

A New Romance Teeming with Love and Adventure

BEATRIX OF CLARE

By JOHN REED SCOTT

Whose "Colonel of the Red Huzzars" (Eleven Editions) captured first place as 1906's most dashing novel.

England in the time of Richard III forms the setting for this tale of romance and adventure, which takes place close about the throne. Beatrix, beauty, heiress, and Countess of Clare, is won by the young knight and courtier, De Lacy, beneath the friendly smiles of both king and queen, while their love affair is troubled by abduction and bloodshed, and influenced by the great events which stir the kingdom and even threaten the crown. The novel is full of "go" from start to finish.

"Not a dull line in the book." *Pittsburg Dispatch.*

"The story is ennobling as well as bright and fascinating." *Baltimore Sun.*

"Holds the interest closely to the end." *Boston Ev. Transcript*

"Noteworthy as a real contribution to historical romance." *San Francisco Chronicle.*

FOUR FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY CLARENCE F. UNDERWOOD.

12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
PUBLISHERS PHILADELPHIA

BEAU BROCADE

By BARONESS ORCZY

Author of "The Scarlet Pimpernel," "I Will Repay," etc.

A captivating romance of love and chivalry—the adventures of a charming highwayman of the days of the English Pretender.

"Faith and courage make the story of 'Beau Brocade' a very interesting one. The hero is delightfully fascinating—bubbling over with exuberance of youth; nothing is a hardship for him. He reminds one of Dumas's famous D'Artagnan, and most especially in his fighting escapades. Gloriously dramatic is the fight in the forge, when, by his prowess, Beau Brocade holds at bay a lot of redcoats, escaping on his steed 'Jack O'Lantern.'"

—*N. Y. American Book Review Contest.*

"The story is so well told, so full of life and action, that one never loses interest from start to finish."

—*Pittsburgh Dispatch.*

"Let no one begin reading this tale late in the evening, for there is no stopping-place till the end, and the end is worth reaching." —*The Congregationalist, Boston.*

"The illustrations in color are unusually attractive."

—*Chicago Tribune.*

FOUR FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY CLARENCE F. UNDERWOOD.

12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
PUBLISHERS PHILADELPHIA

BY THE BARONESS ORCZY

"I WILL REPAY"

A Romance of the French Revolution

12mo. Decorated Cloth, $1.50

THIS period of the great French Revolution appeals to the imagination in a way that no other historic event does. It was so very terrible and yet so very recent. The Baroness Orczy's story deals with the most stirring moment of that exciting time—when the "Law of the Suspect" was in full force, which gave every French man or woman the right to denounce a fellow man or woman to that awful tribunal of the Revolution which knew neither mercy nor justice. The romance of "I Will Repay" is concerned with the tragedy of a soul-conflict 'twixt love and a mistaken sense of duty. The Scarlet Pimpernel, of her former book of this title, plays an important part in the development of the story of "I Will Repay." . . . .

"A good story of action, admirably told."
—*Press, Philadelphia.*

"It will be read eagerly, closed with a long satisfied sigh." —*Nashville American.*

"Clever and well worked out, its details related with dash and spirit, its intrigue and devices adroitly managed." —*Sun, New York.*

"The story is well written, is full of incident and rapid movement, is characterized by a thorough knowledge of the spirit of the time, and displays clear characterization and great power of analysis of human nature. It is worth reading, for it will interest from the first page to the last." —*Public Ledger, Philadelphia.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
PUBLISHERS **PHILADELPHIA**

When Kings Go Forth to Battle

By WILLIAM WALLACE WHITELOCK

Author of "The Literary Guillotine," etc.

A small German principality is the seat of exciting warfare. An unscrupulous king and a conniving "minister of interior improvements" find their match in two invincible Americans who keep the secret of a young prince's hiding-place, and with characteristic American energy join in a revolutionary plot to unseat the reigning monarch and place the prince upon the throne.

"A story that grasps our interest with its first chapter and causes us to follow breathlessly until the climax." —*Baltimore Sun.*

"The prettily tinted illustrations by Frank H. Desch are particularly praiseworthy." —*Philadelphia Press.*

"Told with energy and color, and it is well worth reading." —*San Francisco Argonaut.*

"Some excellent illustrations in color add to the beauty of the volume." —*Nashville American.*

THREE FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY FRANK H. DESCH. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

PUBLISHERS :: :: :: PHILADELPHIA

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 041 811 1

U